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BY

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"CHICKIE, A SEQUEL,"
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JERRY

CHAPTER I

Voices in the hall. A man and her mother. The young girl closed her book, listening with bright, avid intentness.

The voice of the man soft—yet bold.

The woman's rich—a music that played on the heart.

You didn't have to hear the words. You knew the woman smiled—a red, warming smile. And that the man bent down, flushing, and kissed Marza's lips. The joyous intake of breath, the smothered laugh. Then the two of them entering. The portieres opening with the flash, the grace, the color that was Marza King.

She came in swiftly with that bright, arrogant gladness that kept the years at a distance; that made one speak and think of Marza as a girl immortal by right of beauty, by right of fiery joy and daring.

"Why," she said looking in surprise at the girl, Jerry, "aren't you going to the party?"

Jerry's dark, flower-like eyes remained fixed on her mother in profound admiration. She said softly, almost in awe; "I don't know. Lord, you look thrilling! More so than usual. It must be wonderful to be Marza."

Sauntering to the man, she snatched the cigarette he had just lighted and with kid impudence put it between her lips. "Thanks; I'm all out of them."

He surveyed her in puzzled amusement. She gave him a wide grin and went slumping back to her deep chair, puffed the cigarette, reopened her book.

She looked so brazenly young with her long, thin legs crossed and dangling—this black-haired, flashing-eyed Jerry, who was

Marza's daughter. And who had to the point of danger, to the point of pain, Marza's blazing love of life, love of joy, love of love.

She was poignantly aware of each word, each gesture of her mother's, yet she appeared lost in her book. And gave only a vague nod to Marza's farewell.

But the moment the door closed she sped across the room and stared into the street. It was lonely now. Her heart always thumped in the quiet. Marza was one of those bright-hued persons who leave a silence and a dimness when they depart. Presently she appeared at the curb. This was a familiar picture—Marza regal in black furs, orchids flowering on her shoulder, being helped to a limousine by some gallant and charming man who was in love with her. Men usually were.

There were pictures and pictures like this in the girl's mind. Provocative images that awakened hot, stealthy thoughts. Marza down there stepping into the machine, flinging her head up with that soft, brilliant challenge of the yes and the man stooping, his hand closing with caressing warmth on Marza's arm.

The girl, watching, drew in her breath with a sharp, smothered pain. Oh, this terrible, mysterious thing—LOVE! Wild, sweet bond drawing two people together with such overwhelming potence. Bringing that wistful note, that yearning imperious tone to the voices of men.

Would she ever know it—completely, utterly, madly? Twice she had thought it hers. She closed her eyes. Presently a smile went lightly, gaily over her lips. Last spring she had been so sure of it—almost swooning with it. She remembered tears in Billy's eyes. How dear he was and how grown-up he seemed to her then.

When he got the new car for his eighteenth birthday the whole thing was settled. Fly away in this! They loved each other so. They couldn't wait. They wouldn't! Oh the hushed, exciting plans. Elope! Love—marry!

But it rained furiously that Friday night—a drenching rain.

And Jerry was deep in a new book. So cozy and luxurious here in the big lounge by the fireplace.

"Listen," she phoned, "we can't run away tonight, Billy, dear, let's don't!"

A staggered pause: "My God, Jerry, you can't mean this."

The girl burst into laughter. And suddenly it seemed ridiculous—rushing away on a stormy night.

For a silly thing like love! Getting tragic about it.

Billy came blazing up to the house, almost crying with his hurt pride and indignation.

"You've got to come," he ordered masterfully.

"And why do I got to" asked the girl, who was a bit nervous and flippant.

"Good Lord, Jerry, are you going to get snooty about a serious thing like this? You love me—you vowed you love me!"

"I do! But do we need to rush out like a pair of drowned rats over it? Don't be silly and East Lynnish. You know I counted on a moonlit night. Be yourself and admit we'd have a heck of a time getting away with it tonight."

He swallowed a big gulp. "Jerry—play square. Is it only because of the rain?"

"Of course!" she laughed merrily, holding out to him a long fork with a toasted marshmallow. "Sit down. There's a love. Let's plan it all over and pick a summer's eve."

So that passed. To be followed by a dark, and what might easily have become a tragic chapter.

Jerry King standing at the window tried to keep Billy from vanishing in the shadows. She didn't want the face that always followed. But it came with black seductive eyes and the trim Van Dyke beard. She grew frightened thinking of him—Basil North, her teacher in the Life Class.

Their first meeting. Basil picking up her sketch, studying it. Then his hoarse, sweet voice: "Real talent here," and his marvelous eyes dwelling on her eager face, lured by its hint of wildness and the promise of her young, passionate mouth.

She dreamed of him that night—so dark, with that romance and melancholy.

Every girl falls in love with one Basil North or another before she is twenty. He wasn't free, of course. And he couldn't get free. How pleadingly he had told all this.

Jerry pushed the hair from her ears. They were hot yet with the memory of Basil's words. Their long, burning conversations—the veiled, ardent proposals. How he longed and chafed and cursed the fate that kept them apart.

That mad, fervent day when he leaned over her shoulder, his black eyes soft, the silky beard brushing her cheek. She was sketching from life, the figure of a girl. Basil made a few strokes, correcting her drawing.

She was so tremblingly aware of his nearness she dared not raise her eyes. Only nodding when he said: "Wait for me, please!"

They drove in the park. Oh, that beautiful love of his—so tender, so tragic, so unseeking. When he paused suddenly in the midst of a fervid proposal and regarded her with dark, melancholy appeal, all of woman's flaming urge for sacrifice drove her. She ached with pity and dreamed of offering herself to his wounded heart.

It was right—inevitable. Marza had taught her this: "There is but one sin—to violate your own integrity. Do whatever you wish—whatever you are flamingly and completely wanting to do. But never do violence to your own spirit. Never allow anyone else to touch that inner being or to command it, and you will never be hurt, nor can anyone ever hurt you. Know yourself first—then be it to the thousandth degree every minute of your existence. This is the full life and the right life."

To the thousandth degree, the girl of eighteen longed to make right the wrong life had done to Basil.

Saturday she worked at her sketching after every one was gone. In the quiet room the beat of her heart a dark thunder. She kept waiting and waiting.

Nearly twilight when she carefully gathered her crayons and

went softly to Basil's office. More and more slowly as she neared his door. Pushed it. Murmurs. Basil's hoarse, burning: "Darling, how terrible, terrible! If I were free—"

A girl in Basil's arms.

Down the hall stealthily in shame and fury, went Jerry King. Words echoing in a shabby disillusioning: words that had shaken almost to the roots her young, fiery heart. Spoken like a parrot's to another.

She read furiously far into that bitter night, storming and shamed.

She could see Basil North as he was now—with the knowing wrinkles about his eyes and the aging sparseness at his temples.

But she could not think of him without an inward tremor —a hot, half terrified disturbance.

She walked swiftly across the room, shaking back her head, putting these brooding images from her. She didn't want this —this hot, smothering emotion a man like Basil North inspired.

This wasn't love—wasn't the divine sweet rapture that makes the heart clamor to fling itself out, be hurt, be lost, melted in another's.

She would never be fooled by a Basil North again.

She was nineteen and knew better. Nineteen now and filled with imperious, urgent hungers. Expecting great things from Life. Adventure—love—achievement. Tremendous and stirring moments.

Not the paltry excitements of dancing parties and hectic weekends. Something titanic—swept with glory.

She sat very deep in her chair, stormily smoking. After all, what is right and what wrong What joys could one seize and what leave alone?

Came a tap at the door.

"I'm not going, Bud. You needn't wait. I'll not get up and open it."

"Oh, please, Jerry! Just for a moment."

She read on. After five minutes the tapping repeated. This time the boyish plea: "Be a sport, Jerry! I've something great to tell you. Something big."

"You're all wet, big boy!" But she went noiselessly and opened the door a crack. "Shoot!"

A youth about twenty-two grinned penitently. "Let me in, please, Jerry. Listen; you've got to come. Everything's hotsy-totsy tonight. And I'm going to be awfully good. Be your old sporty self and give me another chance."

She put her hands truculently on her shadowy hips and regarded him with eyes of blazing purple fire. "I don't mind being a sport, Bud Malone. But there's a limit. In the last four weeks I've spent $20 on taxis getting you home. I can't afford YOU!"

"I've sworn off, Jerry. Honestly."

He looked very penitent, very pleading, standing there with his head down, nervously rubbing the band of his hat.

She went up and put her hand on the lapel of his coat, saying with an eager sweetness: "But, you ought to be ashamed to need booze. It's a terrible insult to your own vitality, if you need to be jazzed up with gin at the age of 20."

"I know—I'm not going to touch it any more. I don't like it. But everywhere you go, it's poured on you. I'm through."

* * * * * * *

At 11 o'clock a boy and a girl were going up the steps of a big white house. The boy lurched, pulled himself together. "I'm not drunk, Jer—honesh, I'm sober—"

"Then stand still. And give me your key."

He fumbled in one pocket after another—began all over. "Gesh I'll hava climb in the winner—"

Jerry King rang the bell long, witheringly. To the bland Chinese who answered she said: "Please see him safe to bed, Wong. And somebody ought to tell his fool of a father to get on the boat about it!"

* * * * * * *

Midnight. Marza moving softly about the room. In a dream. She came to the girl's bed, kissed the lips that were parted, fresh, dewily young.

Jerry lay very still, feigning sleep. Her heart pinched terribly.

Again and again before her went the noisy tumult of the recent hours. Bud drinking; face getting pasty; other faces smudged with red. Uninspiring faces. Nothing thrilling in this. Not the world one dreams about.

Deep in her thought—buried so deep she was but vaguely aware of it—were other images. A song, a dream, a lighted face. The face of a man young, strong, beautiful. Being taller than she and finer. Taking her hand and the two of them running onward together—onward and upward—the Man of Dreams.

She would never meet him—never in this shoddy world.

Suddenly she was sitting up with a start. Voices in the living room. Marza had gone back there. Many people there.

Out of the mingled sounds came suddenly a laugh, chuckling, throaty, sweet. Voice different from other voices, a hum in it, a deep secret hilarity.

She got up and stole to the door, pushing it ever so little. She picked him out easily—the strong lift of his chin, eyes and mouth eloquent with a hidden mirthfulness, the clean, breezy tan. A sun-god on Olympus might have this look of Saxon Rhodes.

"Well," said Heine Ross, "is that you, Jerry, or a transparent ghost?"

The new man looked up, light thrilling eyes astonished as though she were indeed a slim, wee wraith.

Jerry laughed and pulled the negligee about her. She came padding with bare feet across the room. She stopped directly in front of him, impudent—joyous. "I thought I was dreaming. You woke me up with your laugh."

"I'm very glad I did. Pleased to meet you. You're real, are you?"

"Are you—that's the question!"

Afterwards when she knew so well that Saxon Rhodes was real—painfully and terribly real—she could yet always vision him as he appeared this first, sweet startling night—laughing and with a mirth like a sun god about him.

CHAPTER II

JERRY awakened with a drowsy, delicious feeling; a memory of something that had happened, exquisite, a song echoing.

Like once when she was little someone gave her a kitten. For weeks, even when she wasn't thinking about it, she felt a great happiness. She would stop and wonder what made her want to laugh. Oh, yes—the kitten.

She lay back on the pillow now, watching the golden ferry-boats weaving in and out of the slips. Radiant spring morning. Without even disturbing herself she could see the bay in a vast undulating glimmer; see the islands and the Berkeley Hills. She often thought: "I ought to turn into a big, decent sort of person, looking at that each morning."

But now she took deep, intoxicating breaths, and with lazy, dreamlit eyes watched a smoke ring curling upwards. Presently she would get up and go paddling into the kitchen, cook breakfast, bring it on a tray to Marza's bed. She did this each morning.

And she would find out about Saxon Rhodes. ALL about him. There must be a great deal—color, beauty, fine, high deeds. In the nineteen years of her life there had never been a man like this. Not even Earl Brooks, who was so handsome, who had wished to marry Marza and with whom a little girl of twelve was wildly infatuated.

She pulled reluctantly from bed, crossed the living room, paused to fling up the windows. Nice room, this—lined with George King's books—hundreds of them. Quite thoughtful of him to have bought this place. And just in the nick of time. Of course, he hadn't expected to die. But he did. Within a few weeks. And the purchase of the apartment-house where they made their home, proved fortunate indeed for Marza and her little daughter.

It was a four-story building in Hyde street on the very crest

of Lombard hill. Its windows commanded a three-way view of the peninsula where the city of San Francisco is located. To the west lay the Pacific Ocean: to the north the Golden Gate with the yachts off Sausalito and Belvidere forever shining in the sun: while the east swept in one vast, uplifting panorama the great expanse of San Francisco bay, the coast hills and Diablo mantled in purple mists.

Here, on the third floor lived Marza and Jerry. They managed well enough on the rent of the large first and second floor apartments and the studio suite on the roof.

Jerry loved this home, even feeling a tenderness to George King, her father, that in spite of himself, he had bequeathed them this dwelling place. Each morning the blue waters and the brown hills presented a different aspect.

Now she went slithering down the hall, stopping in amazement before her mother's open door. Marza was up. She was kneeling on the floor packing a suitcase. On a chair, very carefully, her sport clothes were laid out.

"Come in," Marza invited. "Sit on the suitcase. Press hard. It won't close."

Jerry sat hard, her knees hunched, her arms wound about her long, childish brown legs. She looked like a dark, gay butterfly resting.

"One thing that's so thrilling about you, Marza," she offered graciously, regarding her mother with whimsical appraisement, "is that you look well asleep. Few people do. And you're lovelier in the morning without even a ribbon about you. Where do we happen to be going?"

"Why, to Del Monte. Didn't you hear the plans last night?"

"Oh—I didn't know it meant us. Is the whole crowd going?"

Marza glanced up, an arrested question in her eyes. "Meaning Saxon Rhodes? Yes, he's going. You're interested?"

"Why," said the girl breezily, "CERTAINLY! I thought him very exciting."

"But he isn't. He's exceedingly poor. A struggling young architect. He's not half as exciting as Heinie."

"Because of the money?"

"Exactly."

"People with guts don't need money."

"They're the very people who do. They've more capacity to enjoy—more for life. They can use money imaginatively. The poor in spirit should be poor. Money is useless to them."

"But I read a story once of a couple who didn't have a bean and three children. They had a gorgeous time. It's that thing Corny Stratton wrote—'An American Idyl.' Why, they even went to Europe. Penniless! People with imagination can live adventures. Sunsets and mountain tops don't cost money."

"It costs to reach the mountain top."

"Is this your subtle way of advising me to annex Heinie?"

"No. But if it came to a choice and you asked my opinion, I'd say Heinie was the safest bet for happiness. The wife of Saxon Rhodes won't have an easy time, either emotionally or financially. These young idealists make very unsatisfactory husbands.

"They have such a mad dream about it all. No ONE woman can ever fill the bill."

Jerry seized on a word. With half-shut eyes she asked, fascinated: "Is Saxon an idealist? With a thrilling dream of women?"

Marza held up an orange-colored shawl. "I wonder if I should take this?" Then crisply, "Tess Willi is bringing Saxon. So that's that!"

An airy laugh, "You think I can't compete with Tess Willi? A washed-out blonde!"

"Gentlemen prefer them. Besides she has the money a poor ambitious boy needs. She says he's a poet in stone. You see where Tess is driving."

A merry shrug, and looking with a grin at her clasped hands, "Tess Willi rates ten below zero in S. A. Have you considered this?"

Jerry laughed and hopped from the suitcase, "What will you have for breakfast, Mrs. King?"

She stood a moment winding the thin silk nightgown about her vague form. She was suddenly quiet, her eyes warm purple fire. "Money—safe bets—Heinie—who wants them?" Huskily, leaning down to Marza, "Not I! Mother, I'm like you. Give me the rapture! And the terror—all or nothing—LIFE!"

* * * * * * *

At 6 o'clock that singing evening in February three machines drove up to the old Del Monte Hotel.

This was situated 125 miles down the coast southward from San Francisco in the heart of the lovely Carmel Valley. A haunting country with the rugged, picturesque shore line of Monterey Bay: the wind-blown cypress trees and sand dunes, astonishing in their white stillness. Long ago the old Spanish explorer, Vizcaino sailing northward from Mexico pitched a tent under the lone oak growing almost on the breast of the tides. He wrote glowingly of the lofty hills and gracious springs. From that December day in 1603, Monterey has captured poetic imagination—a scene, as Robert Jeffers reveals in the forbidding beauty of many a line, breathing of legends and wild, defiant romance.

Here on this spring evening in 1922, with a very modern week-end automobile party, came a dark-eyed, expectant young girl.

She glanced about eagerly. Oh, those tall, upstanding pines framing the distant blue of Monterey Bay!

She loved this homely, cupolaed building, squatting so affably with the air of a plain, old woman who remains quiet and simple while a setting of supreme and thrilling beauty grows up about her.

A long time ago—ten years—Jerry had come on her first visit. She remembered it perfectly. Her father's sharp, nervous glances, his lips pulled together tightly. Marza, just a girl then, in a drooping red milan and some startling red dress that made her a gypsy queen with the flashing astonishment of dark eyes and red, sweet smile.

Jerry could imitate yet the exact tone of George King say-

ing to Marza as they entered the room, "Must you even smile at the bellhops?"

Other visits were pleasanter. After George was gone. Like this one today . . . gay, touched with suspense.

She turned just as Saxon alighted, his face tan and happy, etched in laughter. Fifty feet distant.

Impulsively she raised her fingers, blew him a swift, taunting kiss.

He pulled off his hat in startled delight. Impudent, delicious kid—that little Jerry King.

She turned, flushing, and hurried after Marza.

She paused combing her hair to wonder eagerly, "Is this love? Yes—yes! Does it come so quickly? Yes—yes!"

Then she thought happily, "He's better than last night—even better than that."

Aloud to Marza, "I'll wait for you—outside—on the veranda."

Crimson glow fading in the sky; darkness thronging with still, intent busyness. Night coming on in beauty, in silence haunting as music.

The girl, white, dark eyes dreaming, moving through the shadows. The trees voiced her expectance, her eager, inarticulate yearning. Murmur of life, hushed, insistent, sweet. She heard it vaguely—a thing wild and lovely, urging her on.

Suddenly she was very alert—listening. A couple coming down the path. The girl, a bit theatrical with her loud, cultivated English voice and her trailing brocade wrap. A young girl with reddish-blonde hair and a quick vivacious manner.

"Hurry!" she said to the man, "Horace Hopkins is like George Washington. He doesn't ask, 'Have the guests arrived?' but 'Is the dinner hour here?' "

The man, with a shrug, took her arm, hurried her to a machine. Going off to dinner—the two of them—Tess and Saxon.

Jerry stood very quiet against a tree.

Tess laughed. As Saxon opened the car she faced him, her face raised. He stooped and gave her a long, rapt kiss.

CHAPTER III

A LONG while after Saxon and Tess were gone, Jerry remained in the shadows intently observing tree trunks barred with silver light. She felt extraordinarily stilled as though she were never to move, never to laugh again.

She knew she was absurd. As though she hadn't kissed quite dozens of men herself. Her sense of humor came freely to the rescue, reminding her derisively: "You wanted that kiss for YOURSELF! You're sore Tess got it!"

She went slowly back, not deigning an answer to Heinie when he excitedly caught her arm and rushed her to his room.

"There won't be a drink left if you don't hurry. I've been searching for you everywhere."

She gave him a pitying stare.

"What did I do now?" he begged humbly. "Jerry, DON'T start high hatting me. My whole weekend will be spoiled."

"Oh, be your age—cut the sob stuff!"

Heinie looked grieved. He was a tall, lanky youth about 23 with a long, kind face and brown eyes like a faithful dog's.

Gay sounds filled Heinie's room. Marza's golden laugh. Sitting on the bed, on chairs, on the floor. Glasses raised. Others entering—men and women of Marza's age, but looking a full decade older. An actress—a famous singer—a man who wanted to be governor.

Out of the medley near Jerry came suddenly this: "Will Tess marry him?"

"Not if Saxon knows it."

From Pete West—cynical, married and 28: "Takes two to decide that. Usually the woman is the two! I gamble on Tess. These strident wenches have a habit of getting what they want."

Jerry sipped vaguely from the glass Heinie offered.

"You're awfully moody," he pleaded.

Later when they were dancing she kept peeking over his elbow. Each time she saw a pair of big swinging shoulders and tan, sunburned hair she grew rigid in Heinie's arms.

They strolled out through the trees. Warm and a scent of hyacinths. Moon swaying in jade gold mist. Heinie's arm tightening. Voice swift, pleading: "Jerry—Jerry, dear—" stooping to her, drawing her closer.

With the suddenness of lightning, her foot came stamping on the gravel: "Hell's bells! Is there anything but kisses and cocktails in this crazy world? I'm SICK of it?"

She went flying up the path—a flutter of angry white.

* * * * * * *

Morning. Wild canaries singing in the pines. Breeze fluttering delicate as gauze.

A young girl swinging a folio stepped into the golden warmth. She threw her head back, taking in a long draught of the sunny air. And went swiftly as though bent on great, serious business up the long, dusty grade that leads from Monterey to Carmel.

Green leaves everywhere, dewy and shining. Suddenly a flock of birds rose from a thicket and went winging upward to a soft blue sky.

"If I could paint the feel of that!" thought the girl, eyes stinging with the poetry of this enchanted morning.

At the top of the grade, she went through the toll gate to the forest.

From the high point here, down over tree tops was a view of the Monterey coast line sweeping up to mountain tops, curving down to water—long, inspiring march to beauty. Jerry King wanted to sketch this.

For half an hour she worked eagerly. Suddenly the dumbfounded look on Heinie's face as she flung from him last night interjected itself. She laughed abruptly. Poor Heinie.

When she took up her crayon again, the flash was gone from it. She leaned back against the slope musing.

Up through the trees came a man and two dogs. A head

flung back in the sunlight; the dogs, beautiful Gordon setters, rushing here and there joyously; now and then halting in utter quiet, motionless and pointing.

Jerry regarded them without stirring. But there crept through her, timidly at first, then with exhilaration, a flurry of joy.

Saxon spoke to the larger dog. It ran up immediately and poked a wet nose in Jerry's face. The man laughed: "He's giving you back what you blew me yesterday. Many thanks!"

She clasped her hands about the dog's neck. "Where did you get them?"

He dropped casually to her feet as though the meeting was arranged. "They're mine. I loaned them to Horace Hopkins for a hunting trip. Listen—where were you last night? I wanted a dance. You didn't go to bed before 11?"

She gave a worldly wise shrug: "At the particular moment when you chanced to be seeking me, I may have been strolling in the moonlight. Under trees."

"You do that, do you? Nicely?"

She buried her hand fiercely in the deep scruff. "I think dogs are better than people! They live cleaner, more natural lives. They're so straightforward! And so darn glad to see you!"

"Oh," said Saxon with a gleam, "May someone, not a dog, who is also darn glad to see you, say it in leaps and bounds as Jack did a moment ago?"

She ignored him. "I wonder if dogs do think we're gods? Like Mr. Gissing and the tramp. You read that—'Where the Blue Begins'?"

"No—what is it about—hot dogs and wild women?"

"Yes—just that," said she, gritting her teeth.

He reached down and picked up the book half open at her feet. "What's this? Asmodeus! Good Lord, child, for a gay little flapper you've a very quaint taste in literature."

"I suppose you know all about flapper taste?"

"I've been told my technique is excellent. And that I give very darling ones."

She grinned, hating Saxon Rhodes bitterly.

He went on, smiling, lazily turning the pages of her book. "I followed you here."

"Oh, thanks."

Deep chuckling laugh, humming with secret hilarity. "I thought you'd be pleased. I want to know what you meant when you asked me if I was real the other night. That was a most adorable remark."

"Part of my technique," said she bitingly.

"Adorable, none the less. Why are you interested in this book—this century old thing? YOU of TODAY!"

"I suppose you think TODAY is easy as well as worthless? I want to tell you that since the world began there was never a harder, more muddled time for a girl than this TODAY."

She leaned back, her head against the tree. He noticed suddenly the dress she wore—a simple navy blue jumper with sleeves and collar of lavender silk. Oddly the lavender seemed the color of her cheeks and eyes; the navy was the tone of her blue-black hair. Rich, warm harmony of color.

"She's beautiful," he thought and was astonished not to have noted this before. Beautiful and very sweet as she sat there musing and troubled.

He reached up, touched her hand: "All the gay technique vanished this morning? Why so? I've been watching you for the last half hour. What were you doing in such a flaming fury? And what do you find so troubling today?"

A trill of merriment. Pleasant the look on his face.

"Myself! For the last half hour I've been deciding my future. Once I thought I was to be a real artist. I know now that I never will be—perhaps not even good enough to make a living in commercial work. That's what I want to do—long to do. If I haven't enough talent for this, I'll be in an awful fix."

"Why?"

"I'll have nothing to do! That's the heck of it today. Unless a girl has to get out and dig for mere bread and butter, there's nothing for her to do. She doesn't have to weave or

spin or cook or wash. She's just as unnecessary as two queens in one beehive. She has no choice, as Schopenhauer points out, between meaningless activity and boredom."

"You might get married."

"I've considered that. Get married and have seventeen children immediately!"

"Quite a drastic escape. Having seventeen children, for all you know, may be just as meaningless activity as painting seventeen worthless pictures."

"But I'd have no time to speculate about it. That helps. And I'd be saved from whole years at a bridge table half a cent a point; saved from whole rivers of gin rickeys. On a lovely morning like this, I don't want to sink into that!

"But I will as sure as fate—unless—"

She reached over to her folio. Suddenly she held a sketch toward him. "You should have judgment, being an architect. I hear that you're a poet in stone. This is the best of my sketches. Tell me—is it any good?"

She handed it over in a breathless, poignant anxiety, shutting her eyes and tucking her small brown hand in his. "I can't look at you while you're deciding. But tell the TRUTH!"

Then she knew he was looking at her with those light thrilling eyes.

She wished to raise hers; glance long and long in his.

"Why," he was saying, fervent and astonished, "did you do this? You little kid? Can you do more like it?"

She didn't listen to the words. She was feeling the warmth of his hand closing on hers, bewildered by the power of it—the deep exquisite sweetness.

He kept looking at her, touched by her ardent, hungry youth—stirred by the lovely softness of her face. In this troubled appealing eagerness she seized his imagination. Not just a sweet, audacious kid now. The wistful picture of a girl standing on a threshold—

"Jerry," he said, "look up, please. I want to see what's in your eyes. Let me."

CHAPTER IV

A FLASH of sunny blue, Jerry's eyes grinning into his: "Hello, there!"

"You're a darling!"

"I know. So are you. Tell me, do you like that sketch? You think it honestly good?"

"It IS good. You keep this up. You go on working at it and you'll never need to worry about boredom."

She drew in her breath rapturously, grabbed back the sketch and kissed it. "Here, I did this of you. Yesterday morning. I call it 'A first impression.' Eh?"

He regarded it, blushing and gleeful: "Well, I wish they'd let you sculp my face in the beginning! This is very nice. And augurs well for our future. Now we can talk. First, what did you mean by asking me if I was real?"

"Well, you see I'd just come from a big wow that turned out to be the dog's dinner. You know—everybody getting tight as ticks: all the fellows forgetting which rib they'd brought and not caring so long as they had one—anyone. Not a bit exciting after ten years.

"You looked so awfully clean and breezy. And you laughed as though you meant it. Very captivating to one seeking a man from the big open spaces where a HE is a HE. And not just an animated gin-flask."

"So that's what you're looking for? What will you do when you find him? Marry him and lose him?"

She twinkled roguishly: "I suppose for the preservation of romance the wise thing would be to give him one long, delicious, immortal kiss and rush to a convent consecrating myself to a memory. Like Heloise."

"You have very charming solutions for this little problem

of life. First to relieve you of boredom you plan to have seventeen children. And to keep love you have the sweet expedient of renouncing it."

"Is there any other way? People who marry it always smear it. Imagine having your man coming up the front steps, grouchily hanging his overcoat in the hall, sidling in with a grumpy, 'Hello, ole lady. Dinner ready?' Oh, wouldn't you love years, and drab years, of that!"

She sat above him on the slope, looking down at him. Now her lips rippled off joyously. "You'd never do that, would you?"

He reached up, would have pulled her to him.

She blew a large puff of smoke in his face. "Not today. But thank you just the same, I've sworn off kissing and such."

"Why?"

"I don't exactly know why. But sometimes, like now, sitting on the top of this enchanting hill, the beautiful water down there and that cloud like a silver hope sailing the blue, I get gulpy longing for things. You know—song of the lark, flash of the moon. Something awfully high and gorgeous. And I want to run after it—wait for it—work for it."

"You think this SOMETHING exists?"

She looked straight in his eyes and smiled—a quick, tight, little smile like a frightened child's. "Yes! Don't you? It must. We all have the dream."

"Yes—the dream." He looked extremely young; almost as fervent as the girl. "But doesn't that prove us a race of insane optimists? Everybody hopes, and everybody is disappointed.

"Why, then, should I believe that somewhere is the perfect mate . . . the girl with appeal and spirit; brains and beauty; fire and substance? Believe in her, and that she's waiting for me—this glory-woman of the horizon! And we'll never weary, I of her or she of me? How on earth would I rate her if she does not exist!

"No, girl! The only way that dream works out is SUCCESSIVELY. You find charm in one; beauty in a second;

intelligence in a third. And so on ad infinitum. Take as you go. Riding the crest all the way!"

She snapped her fingers in his nose: "You know where that trail ends? Unless you're blind as well as insane. It ends with you a paunch bellied, bald headed wet smack at the age of forty. I've seen millions of YOU. If that's what you are!"

He turned a slow, tickled glance upward: "You're the wisest kid I've ever met."

"I shouldn't be surprised if I am. I began my lessons of men and such in the cradle."

"And after nineteen years—." He turned to her with that teasing gleam. "Is it nineteen or nine you are?"

"Just like you—sometimes twenty-four and sometimes four!"

"After nine or nineteen years you still believe in the lost ecstasy? Still think it's lurking behind one corner or the next?"

"Yes!"

Her lips parted, eyes softly purple. He thought he had never seen anyone so lovely as this dark slip of a thing, all flame and sweetness. Never a mouth so winsome; never a laugh so gay.

"Saxon, so do you!"

He took her neat brown hands, pressed them impetuously in his. "Wouldn't it be fun to find it? Let's start after it—you and I—east of the sun, west of the moon, somewhere that's nowhere we'll meet up with it."

He pulled her to her feet laughing. They went down the slope together, arm in arm, the dogs coming after them in merry dashes.

"You're a darling thing," said Saxon Rhodes. "And very bright. Have you read all the books you quote—Heloise, Asmodeus, Schopenhauer?"

"Indeed, yes! And thousands more. You'd be surprised. I think a lot when I'm alone by myself in the dark."

"That doesn't happen very often, does it?"

"It used to—when I was little. I had whole years to myself.

I often read all night. All of Zola and Maupassant before I was fourteen."

"And who let you do that?"

"Myself! I've always done what I pleased. Ever since I was nine. And I'm always going to!" She flung her head up in vivid laughing challenge, feeling herself made of lighted joy. "Such a heavenly day, Saxon—such a heavenly, heavenly morning!"

* * * * * * *

Jerry, dressing for dinner that night, whistled and sang.

"Because of Saxon?" asked Marza.

"Because of life! Isn't it wondrous, wondrous!"

"Yes. As long as you keep the upper hand. Don't let your experiments with life become Life's experiments with YOU. You always lose. Give your heart to love as much as you will. But keep your head. A woman needs it. ALL THE TIME."

The girl smiled on and on, hearing nothing that Marza said; caring nothing for it.

At the dance Heinie dogged her. "Have a heart, Jerry! You've hardly looked at me today. You went off playing golf with him. The whole afternoon!"

"He's new, Heinie, darling. And vastly intriguing."

"And I was going to take you to the niftiest little joint—way off in the Salinas hills—an old-time Spanish gambling hell—staged a real cock fight . . ." He led her reluctant and frowning to the garden.

Then explosively: "Are you going to keep on high-hatting me? Because if you are, I'm going home tonight. I'm going to leave now!"

She stood on her toes, laughing gaily, and brushed a butterfly kiss on Heinie's cheek. "There! Be a he-man, Heinie, and quit the whimpering. No girl wants a baby till she's married."

"I love you, Jerry—really love you. Let's cut the jazz and get married."

"Not tonight, thank you, Heinie dear. Not on this tonight!"

Later she went gliding off in Saxon's arms. She whistled softly.

"Is that you making such music against a man's heart?"

"I!"

"Jerry—a ride? Out there to the heavenly hill. Lovely spring night. Song of the lark, flash of the moon. You and I."

She drew in a long rapt breath and nodded.

They climbed through the hushed lovely silence of the trees. Dark wooded slope. Distant gleam of the water. Lights on a fishing boat. And there over the gentle hilltops, a white, white moon.

"Jerry—Jerry dear—"

"Saxon!"

They were in each other's arms, murmuring, lips and hearts meeting.

This was the moment of beauty; the divine sweet fervor she had awaited. She knew it by the thing like tears rushing; like voices singing.

CHAPTER V

LATE that momentous night Jerry stood at the window. She listened to music drifting through the garden, vague yet haunting, as distant music always is. Like the piercing-sweet song in her heart.

She was alone—a slim dark shadow like an eager boy with her hair short and wind-blown. Over her forehead and making her eyes that shadowy purple went a deep wave like the topknot Marza twined on her finger when Jerry was a very little girl.

"Oh, I love him," she thought, her whole being melting to liquid fire. "I shouldn't! I won't!" But she looked into the courtyard of flowers and wanted to rush out there murmuring to the trees of this heart-filling beauty. Press her face against moist, cool leaves.

Where was he? If he were but down there in the garden she would go out immediately, lose herself in his arms.

She wished he was out there—wished the whole world would vanish excepting Saxon Rhodes out there in the garden waiting and she rushing out to be lost in his arms.

In books: in dreams it happened so.

She couldn't endure the quiet, the hemmed-in feeling of the walls. She went tiptoeing across the room, down the long corridor into the shaded, leafy paths. She looked at the moon shining so goldenly and thought with an ardent sigh: "Oh, heavenly, heavenly!"

Suddenly she laughed softly. She sank on the grass, leaning her head against a tree. "What a fine fool I've turned out to be! I suppose he's safe in bed, snoring like a steam engine!"

But she pictured him, tanned and happy, with the look of a sun-god about him: pictured him with his arm about her, the

light thrilling eyes going into hers, drinking up her heart.

She thought, eagerly, helplessly: "I'm in for it! I'll never laugh this one off!"

A thousand years ago women loved in this fashion. Poor Manon Lescaut. And a thousand years hence they will still love so. As long as a human heart beats and the dream of supernal emotion remains.

* * * * * * *

To Jerry King the dream had come. She accepted it with all the aching fervor of nineteen: with the starry song of youth: forgetting utterly that she was Marza's daughter, sophisticated, open-eyed, wise as sin and just as old.

She thought of Saxon romantically—a being touched with glory—as long ago Priscilla thought of John Alden.

That first night when she peeked at him through the crack in the door she had felt this radiant distinction setting him apart, head and shoulders above all other men.

And she felt it cruelly, joyously as the weeks went on. She found herself wondering sharply how much Saxon cared. Was it just the enchantment of the spring? He was very popular and despite his lack of means much sought after.

Pretty girls—girls who had money and position wooed him. They kept his phone busy. Did he favor her among them all?

Saxon was young—just twenty-four and with a great ambition. He didn't mean to putter around all his life with pretentious little bungalows. He would be a builder of towers and cathedrals—lovely dreams in stone. Years of study needed for this—sojourns in Paris with courses at the Beaux Arts.

They talked about it very gaily.

"Pack up your sketch book, Jerry, girl, and we'll hie along. Think of the fun we'd have starving in the Artists' Quarter together!"

In preparation of the blissful adventure they talked French; they read French novels.

They were jesting, of course. But Jerry tucked the hope of it warmly in her thoughts. She gave herself now with fervent devotion to her studies.

As she leaned over her easel, Saxon's face and Saxon's voice came to her. She would fancy herself and him sitting at a little table in one of the street cafes of Paris, eating dinner. Rollicking friends—all artists, builders, dreamers—would come singing up to join them.

She would forget to draw, forget the model, forget her classmates and smile dreamily.

One day Basil watched her. He came silently and took the crayon from her hand. "Who is HE?" he murmured, stooping down.

As she was going out that afternoon he blocked her path: "Jerry, I've some wonderful sketches sent from New York. Have a look at them."

She followed to his office, recalling with a twinge the burning excitement of six months previous when she had come with such young girl fervor, meaning to offer Basil her heart. Let him do with it as he would. . . . The girl in Basil's arms.

She surveyed the man quietly now, noting with critical coldness the pictures he set before her.

"Jerry," said he, the marvelous eyes turning on hers with delicate, reproachful tenderness, "why are you treating me so? I've spent frightful hours over it."

Her lips twinkled merrily: "Lonely hours? Basil, dear, am I breaking your heart in a brand new place?"

He flushed darkly: "Should you laugh over this, Jerry? I thought you cared. You said so," he put his hands on her shoulders, looking down with a passionate yearning. "You've said it, Jerry, with your own dear, beautiful lips closed on mine. Can I forget this—"

She did not like this picture and frowned.

"All this you said. And leave me to months of dreary desolation."

"And in all the wilderness of women, Basil, could you find no one to soothe you? Not even ONE!"

He seized her, crossing his arms about her: "Jerry! Good Heavens, what has come over you?"

She pushed from him trembling. But the next moment

a roguish glint in her eyes: "Old age, Basil, has come over me. But don't despair. New crop of 18-year-olds blooming each year. Thanks for showing me the pictures."

She threw a gay, silver laugh against his face and went swiftly into the sunny radiance. Wondering how Basil North had ever charmed her; how she had ever dwelt in that hot, dark emotion, believing it wonderful and fine.

So different from the uplifting, singing radiance that now swept her; that made her steps as she hurried for a meeting with Saxon, swift as wings.

He was at his office waiting for her: wanting to show her plans for a Spanish house he was to build in a perfect setting high among the eucalyptus in Saint Francis Woods.

"Well?" said he, a little nervous as she scanned them so long in silence.

She glanced up to his boyish, expectant face. So open—so young. No play acting here. She grinned.

"They're adorable."

"Why in hell didn't you say it sooner!"

"I was wondering if you couldn't put a big cathedral window here in the living room. Those trees out there are lovelier than any canvas."

"Yes—yes, I've tried it. I worked half of last night, but they want the fireplace there—"

"Look," said she, grabbing the pencil from him—

They bent their heads together, sketching—correcting—flaming."

"I've got it!"

He watched her firm little hand: its fervid strokes.

"You win! You darling. Just the thing—the very thing. Isn't it a love of a place?"

"Yes, and with books in a little niche here—a big old chair there, a screen to give the touch of mystery. . . ."

"And you, Jerry, on one side of the fireplace. I on the other!"

"Oh, heavenly, Saxon! If such things only were! And only lasted."

"Sometimes I half think they could be, Jerry."

She closed her eyes on a laugh—laughing while he kissed her. Sweeter than anything she had ever known.

He pulled his hat to a jaunty angle: "Well, woman, I'll blow you to tea. You've done a good day's work for papa."

They went to the Palace. They were scarcely seated and he was just saying: "I feel like a million dollars. And do you know I was absolutely sunk before you came in"—when there came trailing half across the room a loud, dramatic voice.

Jerry knew it instantly. Saxon blushed. Tess Willi came sauntering to their table. She greeted Jerry brightly, held Saxon's hand in a long clasp as he stood. Not lowering her tone:

"I'll be after you early. Be ready when I come: Noon tomorrow."

CHAPTER VI

"WELL, be good—both of you! And don't do half the things I'd do!"

With an air of great éclat, as though she said a thing brilliantly wicked, Tess took herself off.

"Tactless," fumed Saxon, ruffled and annoyed at the meeting.

"Thus she disposes of me!" thought Jerry, burning.

Aloud, in a very flat tone and looking carelessly across the room: "A weekend at the Hopkins. You know—Pebble Beach. I happen to be driving down with Tess."

"I guess that makes me the bee's knees over Saturday and Sunday! But why so mournful because of your polygamy? It's what we're all craving, but only a bachelor may enjoy."

She began humming in a dirge-like cadence Kipling's line:

> "And the more that you see of the OTHERS,
> "The less you will settle to ONE!"

"Exciting! If I were a man, Saxon, I'd play it wide and reckless!"

"You don't need to be a man to play that game today."

"Yes," said she, "you do. It will always be a man's game. A girl can't get away with it because she can't get away with her fool heart. Sooner or later she falls in love and wants to MARRY the man. Wretched taste, of course. It's like starting a poker game with both parties agreed on beans for stakes. Then when you find yourself winning, demanding that you be be paid in dollars. A piker's way—but the way of a woman in love! Always! We're not very sportsmanlike and we never will be!"

Again she hummed softly, this time a rhyme from a current magazine:

"'Here's to the Men!
If you like 'em, you love 'em.
If you love 'em, you let 'em.
If you let 'em, you lose 'em.
Goldarnem!'"

"Erudite and poetic, aren't you? But a little liar, none the less. The girls are playing the game in your generation. And they aren't marrying us."

"Boast while you may! At the ripe old age of twenty-four. We're stepping along—yes. But the free ladies are still the minority—a noisy minority that sounds like a great popular voice. But a minority. For the one girl who does, there are dozens who don't. They four-flush brilliantly through the first round—a kiss and such. But the first round is the last!"

Said he with a teasing chuckle: "That depends on the finesse of the man who calls the bluff."

Over her tea cup, Jerry grinned in his face: "Whooppee, Casanova, the second! May God deliver all lady Saint Anthonys from your wiles."

She was thinking hotly: "Damn Tess Willi for spoiling our lovely hour!"

They chatted on—the ready slang coming happily to her tongue.

But each time she looked in Saxon's winning eyes she recalled him in the moment when he stopped and gave that long, rapt kiss to Tess.

Did he also say to Tess the mad, sweet words he murmured to Jerry?

"I wish I'd never met him," she thought, blazing. "I wish I could get out of this—OUT OF IT!"

* * * * * * *

She went sauntering about the living room that evening. And everywhere she went Saxon's eyes and Saxon's voice followed.

She touched the books that had been her company in a

lonely, happy childhood. What thrilling pictures she had drawn of her future as she devoured history and romance. She would be brilliant as Madame de Stael; fascinating as Mary, Queen of Scots.

At seventeen, watching Marza with smothered pain and wonder she had longed for the time men would kneel at her feet—handsome, kingly men. Always they at her feet. Never she at theirs!

And now—

Suddenly she said to Marza, "Were you terribly in love with my father so that you thought you would just melt away longing for him?"

Marza, with her feet on a chair smoked dreamily—a poetic figure. She answered with disturbing intuition:

"You'll get over it, Pet. Every girl at nineteen goes through it. Inevitable as the measles."

"You might answer the question in a kind way! I'm looking for information. Not condolence!" Flashing with sore pride, Jerry glanced at her mother.

Marza was exceedingly pale—drained even to the lips. It seemed to Jerry her voice had a stricken tone.

"I was just seventeen when I married your father. You were born before I was eighteen. I was not wildly in love with him—then or ever."

"Oh, Marza! Then you met the real man a few years later? You never told me this. You met him and loved him wildly? But it was too late?"

Marza measured her slowly "When you meet the real man, it is never too late."

She turned the page of her book. Very coolly. Very quietly. No color came back to her cheeks. And for the next hour she uttered no word. She turned no page. She sat there motionless as though she had turned to stone.

Jerry had the frightened sense of stumbling on a deep and scarring tragedy.

Marza sat quiet like this when those letters came from Chicago from her old sister to whom she sent large checks

each month and whose monthly letters made Marza distracted and quiet. Jerry had never seen this sister of her mother's. But each year Marza went to visit her.

And often the girl came home to find Marza tearing a letter to pieces. Then she would sit the whole evening, sunk in a frightful gloom.

The girl would plead: "What can she say to trouble you so? Why do you read the letters? Oh, you must love her violently."

Marza would only answer: "Come here, my blue-eyed pet, and kiss me. Why should you bother? She is lonely for me and I am lonely for her. That is all."

Now Marza looked as she looked in those solemn, awful moods. "Oh," thought the girl, "Marza has loved and lost. And nothing in life makes up for that. Terrible—terrible!"

Abruptly Marza spoke: "I hope you're not counting on marrying Saxon."

"Have a heart, Marza! I know my onions. But why should you hope that? He's delectable, if you ask me."

"But not thinking of marriage. You will only break your heart."

"Once in a while we hear of a marriage today, Marza. I could quote you seven or seventy June brides if you wish to hear. The institution isn't quite passe as yet."

"Saxon Rhodes hasn't money enough to marry. But, what is worse for you, should you be vaguely dreaming of it, he hasn't the wish to marry. Young men today have lost the urge.

"What can the apartment-house marriage give him that the apartment-house liaison denies? Nothing, my pet, but burdens and monotony. Why then should a man marry? Merely to acquire a pick-pocket whose filching he must endure?

"Besides Saxon is off on a week-end with Tess."

"I know! We met her at tea this afternoon," said the girl lightly.

She was glad Marza's back was turned; glad no one saw the red flame in her cheeks.

"I'll not see him any more!" she kept repeating hotly.

And then she was running to the door—opening a box. Not from Heinie—not from Bud!

Who was sending flowers today! Lost chivalry!

Her hands flew for the note. And the next moment, almost with a song, she read:

"I'd rather be under the summer moon tonight with the one who doesn't—the sweet one who doesn't—than with the hundred who do. Yours now and tomorrow. SAXON."

CHAPTER VII

She had wondered and wondered about this strange, dynamic force—love.

Twice she had thought it hers.

Now she knew.

She took Saxon's note and ran into her room, reading it over, though the words were singing in her heart. No one since the world began had ever known such inspired sweetness. Never, in all the loving of men, had words thrilling as these been spoken.

She laughed softly and pressed the roses to her lips. "Oh, I love him, I love him," she whispered, and could have gone on saying this endlessly, laughing and pressing the roses against her face.

She carried them to the living room, arranged them on the table. She wondered if Marza had ever felt quite such a shine and tumult: ever heard such heavenly music.

"Lovely," said Marza.

With a lilt that flew out before she could check it: "Saxon sent them!"

"Lovely, lovely," said Marza again, looking at the roses sadly.

"She doesn't want me to have it," thought the girl, baffled.

Marza, to whom love had brought such vital gifts, was now begrudging it to her own child. Why?

Jerry had seen love sweep up in Marza like a flame, making her eyes brilliant and her voice a song.

A long while since she had first seen this. It was that summer, eleven years now, when Stephen Marsh stopped for a visit, just before her father died.

They had taken a house up in the hills of Los Gatos. The

girl remembered the visitor, Stephen Marsh, vividly. He was very tall with dark brown hair frosted at the temples, but young and a laughing, lordly fellow.

He had given Jerry a bracelet with silver bangles—oh, dozens of them that tinkled when she moved her wrist. She liked that. She was just past nine then.

One day her father called her peevishly. He was ill—dying of tuberculosis. He'd not been well since that time in the Ural Mountains, where he was gone so long. A brilliant mining engineer—George King.

But his last year he spent traveling about in a fury of resentment that life and this young, beautiful woman who was his wife were both escaping him.

He called Jerry to his chair. "Go out in the garden. Sit with your mother. It's nice and sunny out there. Stay until Mr. Marsh leaves."

The little girl ran from him, not liking his bony hand. And guessing, as a child will, that he was angry with Marza—very mean about something. She went to her mother's room, intending to hide.

Through the open window two inches from her, came a voice—Stephen's voice: "Oh, Marza, six years of this! How much longer?"

Marza reached up with her white, slim hand and covered Stephen's lips. He took her hand as though it was a flower and crushed it to him. He said hoarsely: "Damnable—Marza!"

Then Marza asked some eager question.

"Yes—yes!" Stephen answered. "I've seen her—the angel."

Suddenly they were both laughing. And when Marza came in her eyes were lighted. They were like lights dancing.

Jerry never saw Stephen after that brief hour.

In a little while her father died.

One day she lost the bracelet and was heartbroken. Then she asked about Stephen, and if he might be coming again. Marza got terribly white. She said: "He's not coming any

more! He's gone far away," and Marza ran into her room, locking the door.

For two years it was very quiet. People were surprised that Marza grieved so. One day Jerry heard two of her mother's friends talking. One said to the other: "I didn't think she cared a snap for him. You never can tell! Who'd ever have pictured Marza King going into solitary confinement for that weazened tyrant—George King!"

Then Earl Brooks, whom Jerry had adored, came. He wanted to marry Marza. He was rich, and they would all go to Europe, and Jerry would be sent to school to a convent in Paris.

Earl had talked to the little girl and had asked her how she'd like that. And didn't she think he'd make a nice daddy?

But Marza wouldn't marry him. And Earl, too, went away.

There were other men. Things became joyous. There were gay crowds in the living room. They sang; or they sat smoking and talking about the most exciting things till late —ever so late.

Marza let Jerry sit up with them.

Other nights Marza pinned orchids on her shoulder and went down the hall with that hushed, happy laughing, the man who was in love with her, helping Marza to a machine.

And the eager, watching girl at the window. The glow and joy of Marza's face. Love meant this to her—kept her young with all that vital arrogance.

Why did she not want Jerry to know it?

"But don't you think Saxon magnificent?" said the girl abruptly, as though they had not dropped the subject. "Don't you think him handsomer than any man of the present day?"

She laughed merrily and blew a kiss to Marza because she felt so high and joyous.

Marza smiled. Then her lips trembled. The girl was very dear to her—dewy and lovely.

"I think Saxon delightful. Not handsome. Certainly not! Why, pet, he has a pug nose and quite a noticeable jaw."

"But I love a fighting face! And eyes that are full of lights.

Oh, mother, he's entrancing! You know he is! But you think I'm in love, don't you? And that I'm hanging my heart to the sour apple tree like an old-time mid-Victorian."

"You are mid-Victorian to be dreaming of marrying Saxon. You think I'm against him. Not at all! I see his charm. I like him immensely. But I know his mood. Even though he loves you as you hope he does, he's not ready to marry. And he won't. I don't want you to wrong him and crush yourself by taking the gaiety he offers too solemnly."

Said Jerry, her chin resting on her hunched knees, her straight, childish arms wound about them, "Are you thinking I may spring a shotgun wedding on you! What a thrill if I did!"

She no longer cared what Marza might answer. She was recalling Saxon's teasing eyes, turned happily to hers over the plans for the Spanish bungalow: "You, Jerry, on one side of that fireplace—I on the other!"

So he, too, had pictured them dwelling together in a dream of gladness. Imagine a little house like that among the trees—they two loving always.

She went in and wrote him a long, bright letter, full of the audacious kid sweetness he adored.

* * * * * * *

"So you loved them, did you? The flowers?" he asked Monday night when they met again.

She answered impudently, "Did you give Tess any darling ones this trip?"

"No—snooty ones. What kind did you give Heinie?"

"None—that is, technically none."

She grew abruptly silent and gazed into the dark pool of water. It was a summer night in late August, nearly six months since the moonlit spring when they first kissed.

Hushed here—a wilderness in the midst of the city—this secluded tree-girt reservoir on the crest of Hyde and Lombard.

They were just across from Jerry's home. She could see the lights in Marza's bedroom. But they might have been in

an island forest, so remote were they in thought and feeling from all other souls on the earth.

"You sighed, Jerry, when you said that. Why?"

She shook her head slowly and remained gazing dreamily at the water.

Then he said—affected by the poetry of the night, and by the wistful droop of her head: "Oh, Jerry, what is it you're wanting so hungrily from life? That you think it's worth refusal of all the lesser joys that are so beguiling along the way? And how will the dream, if it ever comes, be deeper or richer because you've spurned the sweets as you go?"

"It's just an ideal, Saxon. You want to set one person—the person you adore, apart from all others. You want to share it all with just one—with one alone. So that this experience shall be unique with no taint of other lips; no echo from other voices—a supreme, untouchable emotion.

"Oh, I'm a glutton, Saxon. I don't want mere sense thrills—the kind of thing any butcher's boy can feel. I want love—real love—a shiny, immortal thing that picks you up, mind and soul and body, and carries you to the ends of eternity. When I love it shall be like this—utterly—madly—oh, . . ."

"Jerry—you're loving now."

"Yes—you!"

CHAPTER VIII

Saxon Rhodes sat on a high stool before his draughting board. He worked with mechanical precision. The smile on his face had nothing to do with this work.

But with a warm, delicious memory—the memory of little brown hands, soft and silky as flowers curling in his, and the fierce young sweetness of that, "Yes, I'm loving now—YOU!"

All day this loitered in his thoughts happily like a tune. She loved him—she would follow to the ends of the earth—always. She was his, this flame-sweet, flower-eyed Jerry. If he cared to claim her.

His heart flushed on the image of her in that poignant moment—the way she had been standing gazing in the pool, the wistful droop of her head. Suddenly blazing into life, reaching her hands to him in that dear, husky avowal.

Lovely as a dream—all tenderness and fire. His—if he wanted her, and he did! Piercingly. Wanted her just as she stood on the hill last night, young, passionate, beautiful—like that always.

He began to picture her. What was she doing now? Slumped deep in a chair, head against a cushion, thinking. Of him? Remembering things and smiling?

Or would she be moving about in that dining-room that faced the water—setting the table for one, propping a book against the sugar bowl? If Marza was going out for dinner, as most probably she was, Jerry would eat alone.

He mused on this, fancied himself stealing into the room, taking the chair opposite her. The light that would fly into her eyes—the bubble of very young laughter.

He pushed the papers and pencils impulsively aside. Sweet to surprise her so. He would.

He shrugged into his coat, humming a song.

The door to an inner room opened. A man, short in stature but with a marvelously set head and a face of supreme beauty, called out: "Not going, I hope! Thought you'd make me the sketch for Bromley."

Saxon slipped off his coat and with a smothered curse, hung it again on the hook.

"Oh, by the way, Page was greatly pleased with the window you worked into his living room. Nice that. I'll have a bite with you, later on."

Saxon grinned. Later on would probably be midnight. Time meant nothing to Paul Rhodes. He never tired and imagined others—especially Saxon—endowed with the same blazing energy. A genius—consumed with one fervor—his work. It was breath to him. He was a slave to it and an unconscious slave-driver to others.

He would return to that room now and sketch bold, imposing elevations for the million-dollar apartment house he was about to create. He would forget Saxon, forget time, forget hunger. Hours later when Saxon knocked, he would come out, apologetic, incredulous, even offended that time had vanished so swiftly.

Lovable, inspiring, ruthless, the thought of his uncle goaded Saxon incessantly. A man still young who had reached the top of his profession by sheer intellect and effort, Paul's presence was continually urging: "Work, slave, forget yourself. You, too, can achieve."

In lazy moods he would think: "Why should I sacrifice the pleasant life: the well-balanced life when I haven't the genius to warrant it? All right for Paul to live like a recluse: to give up everything for his work. He can make some contribution. No use in kidding myself. I'm average. I might as well take happiness—let achievement go hang."

He would rationalize in this manner when he was taking time off for weekends. Or when, for three or four nights in succession he was devoting himself to pleasure. After all, a fellow is only young once! And for such a brief moment—

This proved a very soothing attitude. But he was never able to hold it long. A piece of work would suddenly absorb him. Or Paul would note some brilliant detail in one of his sketches. He would offer a scant word of praise.

Saxon was young enough to be carried way by this. He would plunge heart and soul into the dream that had kept him grinding through four years at college, and that made him now hold himself down mercilessly to his work.

He still owed Paul $1,300.

It was this thought that now came stealing upon him as he went back to his stool. He wrote on the corner of a paper: $1,300—

Paul had helped him in his last two years at college because Paul had faith in him and wanted him to give all his time to his studies.

He got out the rough sketch of the Bromley place. It was to be an Italian farmhouse, a vision of loveliness, rising in natural beauty like the very trees on the knoll.

He didn't draw. He thought of that $1,300—a symbol of his ambition.

And he thought of Jerry. Thought of last night. She had reached her hands to his neck and laid her soft cheek on his. The sweetness of this movement went through him like a music. He loved her. He wanted her. Exceedingly.

Suppose—well, suppose they did get married—

His breath labored on the thought. Then he laughed softly, imagining himself and Jerry going off together.

He became warm and excited—burning with restlessness. Why could they not do this?

He pulled a sheet of paper roughly—began furiously to sketch. No—he couldn't get married. He hoped he wasn't going to go insane and try this.

It would end in misery. For both. Paul would be disgusted—would probably kick him out. And he was under a moral obligation to carry on here at least till his debt was paid.

He considered first one side—then the other. Oh—throw

everything up—rush off—seize this sweet, bright gift that had come to him. Perhaps, from every standpoint it was the better thing to do—dear little Jerry—his wife. . . .

Then the other—the years in Paris that Paul kept so alluring before him. Lord! Give up this dream? He would NOT!

Settle down into miserable commonplaceness? A draughtsman all his life?

He began to work furiously.

* * * * * * *

Not till Friday, partly because Paul had kept him busy the whole week and partly because he feared his own emotions, did he see Jerry again. But her voice that afternoon over the telephone called to him so gaily—so audaciously.

"Oh come down, please!" he called back on a joyous impulse. "Have dinner with me."

At 6 o'clock she sauntered blithely to his desk. They were alone. He looked up with a chuckling laugh and caught her in his arms. They kissed. Just then Paul entered.

Paul stepped quickly back to the hall.

A moment later the door opened. They came out, chatting gaily, quite unconscious that anyone had seen their stolen sweetness.

Paul went in and sat at the immense high board that was his altar. Saxon's sketches for the Italian farmhouse were laid carefully before him. He glanced at them, became excited, then vastly pleased.

Abruptly he recalled the dark-eyed girl—Saxon kissing her. Was Saxon thinking of marriage?

Faces came to his mind. Lewis Field. Lewis was an artist—twenty-two, when he came to work with Paul. A year later Lewis fell in love. And married. The girl was rich and very stunning. She led him a merry dance. Lewis began coming late to work: then exhausted to work—and finally drunk to work.

After Lewis, Blake Cornwall, enterprising, a little unscrupulous, but with a great flash about him. And Blake fell

in love. She was a business girl, a "fifty-fifty pal." Blake went about declaring that two can live as cheaply as one—more so, in fact.

He married and found that two, when one is a wife, live as cheaply as four. Besides, there were all of Irma's friends to keep up with. There was the automobile, the radio, the nursemaid and the anniversary diamond that Ella Symonds boasted. And anyone knew Ty wasn't as clever as Blake.

So one fine day, Blake the architect who was to carve his name in classical stone, disappeared. And Blake the builder of claptrap: of showy little stuccoed mansions, took his place.

It never failed, thought Paul—an artist married is an artist lost.

He began to wonder about Saxon. Was he in love with this girl—bent on marrying her? Would he, too, throw over the superb, fine dream because it asked too much?

Paul Rhodes pushed the sketches from him and reached moodily for his hat. His thoughts boded ill for Jerry.

CHAPTER IX

THAT summer night! For a long, long time it thrilled in Jerry's thought, the sweeter for its undertone of pain. They drove out to the water—the ocean that was high tonight and splendid with the searchlight from Tait's going far out to meet the silver moonlight.

"You know, Saxon," she began softly, "I think I'm to get the prize for that etching I sent to New York—the one I did in Monterey—the coast line and the cypresses. Mac Phail thinks I ought to try my hand at illustrating. I can't earn my living doing only the things I like. I haven't talent enough for that. He thinks I should try the magazines. I'm excited about it. It's a solution."

"Of what?"

"Oh—me!" She flung her head up with a long gay ripple of laughter. "It means I can take care of myself. I'll never be a halter round the neck of someone else's spirit like wives often are."

"Apropos of what?"

"You!" Again she laughed. "I'll put the fear of God in you or rather, and it's much more deadly, the fear of matrimony. So I just want to tell you I plan to make my own way first—so that you or whoever he may be will never be hampered making yours."

"Jerry! If I had enough right now! Jerry, dear, do you know how much I mean this? I'm thinking of you all day . . . each night. And when you put your hand in mine—all curled up and soft this way—I could throw everything over!"

She reached up and framed his face in trembling hands: "Oh, I love that. I'll remember that! But, Saxon, I've got to earn my living somehow. I couldn't do it washing your

dishes and cooking your tripe. I'd get so damn moody and drab. And you'd go out searching the lavender ladies who have time to manicure their nails. So I've got to find more enchanting pursuits.

"So much more fun, don't you think, for you to have your life and I to have mine? And we could each enrich the other instead of stealing from him as is the way of most married folks. Why shouldn't it be as Romain Rolland says, a two-fold blooming instead of a mutual enchainment? Wouldn't it be lovely, Saxon, if we could work it out like that?"

"A two-fold blooming?" He stooped down suddenly and wrapped her in his arms. "Oh Jerry, I want you! Why couldn't we?"

"You have me. Always!"

Find some great studio room, live there working out gaily their bright thrilling destinies. They could!

Gaze immortally and understandingly across flowers and candle-light into each other's dream-sweet eyes. This would be their marriage.

* * * * * * *

A week later Saxon was sitting in his office, the now completed sketches for his Italian farmhouse laid before him. There was one lovely sketch in color. He kept looking to the door and wondering if Jerry would come. He wanted to show her this.

The door opened. He was about to spring to it, face lighted with pleasure. He saw Paul and turned with a soft, muttered: "Oh, damn!"

Paul was at his side, reaching not quite to his shoulder. "Pleased with them?"

"Yes," said Saxon, studying his uncle nervously, "but are you?"

"You won't see anything finer in all Italy. By the way—how soon do you figure to go over?"

"Two years. I can't manage it a moment sooner."

"Two years? You'll be 27. And by the time you've returned and got started again, well past thirty. Too late! If it's to

do you any good, you've got to go now! Before you get sidetracked. I've been thinking this. Better start by the end of the month. Get there and started at work before the first of the year."

Casually, like that! Plucked up bodily. No ifs or ands!

* * * * * * *

Late that evening he came to Jerry. He told her—blurted it out because he was stunned and not quite realizing it himself.

She looked at him with very large, startled eyes—eyes that glowed, yet had little sparks of fear. "Really?" said she, vaguely. "Really going—oh, that's wonderful for you, Saxon—isn't that wonderful!" She came running and buried her face against him. For a moment he thought she was crying.

But she looked up laughing—impish: "You're taking me! I'll stow away. You bet I will!" Then, solemnly, "When, Saxon?"

"In two weeks."

"We only have two weeks more—only that long?"

She kept nodding and smiling. Suddenly she pressed her face against his coat sleeve, curling her hand in his. After a long moment she reached her hands to his neck, kissed his lips.

Flame-sweet purple eyes they seemed as they turned so eagerly—with such pathetic bravery to his. "I love you, Saxon . . . oh, very much. But do you want to go away thinking of me—waiting for me?"

He held her in front of him and looked down longingly. He thought: "Isn't she young! She didn't seem so young before. I shouldn't leave her. I'm going to regret this."

"Answer me, Saxon—oh, please . . . and say only the veriest truth. Will you go away thinking of me? Loving me? Wanting to come back to me?"

"Wanting you—loving you. And coming back to YOU—Jerry, yes—to YOU!"

* * * * * * *

His last day. Saxon stood in his room, the drawers of his chiffonier opened. He was both excited and depressed; half

of the time regretting, half the time wild with impatience to be gone.

He lifted out shirts, collars, socks. Under these and usually hidden were stacks of letters. From girls. He knew, without opening them, certain phrases that had delighted him and that now brought a gleam—a young, boastful sparkle to his face. Half reluctantly he began tearing the envelopes.

There came rattling from under the papers a silver horseshoe, large and tarnished. He turned it slowly. Martin Rhodes, his father, had made this on his wedding day . . . had gone to the foundry and cast this silver horseshoe for Mary, his bride, and for luck. The next day he handed Mary all his worldly wealth—seven dollars and fifty cents. To the day of her death Mary could weep and laugh telling of this.

In Martin's day such things were done. A man, when he was young and in love, didn't stop to count the pennies in his pocket nor to read the cynicisms in his philosophy. He married his girl. And took a gambler's chance on the turn of it.

Hurriedly, with a twist at the heart, Saxon dropped the horseshoe in his pocket. Jerry's voice was in his ears; the flame-bright eyes turned eagerly, trustingly to his:

"How could it be wrong, Saxon, that you love me—want me—"

He gulped.

In two years all this would be changed—lost perhaps.

* * * * * * *

The trees closing the reservoir in darkness made a soft murmuring sound like running water.

For a long time they spoke only a few words. They sat with their hands tucked together.

Saxon thought: "Lord, I'm going to be homesick." He recalled the bitter loneliness of the year he had gone East to school. How excited he had been to see Esther Hill. Esther, whom he had scarcely noticed before, looked like an angel to him—for no reason in the world, except that she came from home and knew the home folks, who in absence had most amazingly become very dear.

Loneliness is a vast devastating ache.

He drew Jerry closer. She was so warm and sweet. The boy's topknot of her black, thick hair brushed against his cheek.

"I'm going to miss her terribly—terribly," he murmured to himself.

Jerry, sinking in his arms thought: "He's leaving—another hour!" She wished, as often when Saxon held her and the sweetness of his lips seemed more than she could bear, that the world would vanish; would leave them stranded in this moment, swept eternally in each other's arms.

Again she thought: "Nothing will ever change for me. It will be he, always—he only."

This was solemn and a little frightening. Think of it—less than a year ago they didn't know each other; now they seemed so much one that the parting inflicted a mortal hurt.

She looked up quickly: "I've never said goodby, before, Saxon. Not like this!"

He kissed her.

"I hope the two years fly!"

"They won't. They'll drag like an unhappy lifetime."

"Saxon, a lifetime isn't long enough—half long enough for all the love I've got for you!"

He saw and loved the dewy brightness of her eyes. "You don't know, Jerry. You're so young—younger tonight than before."

"Long past twenty now! I waited for love a long time—I was always so certain that I'd know instantly when it came. And I did! The moment I looked at you—that very first night. I almost told you so."

"I wish, I could be sure of this, Jerry. That you're really going to wait for me. And when I come back it will be just as it is now. With both of us. I've a terrible feeling that it won't. That something will be changed. That I'm losing—I don't know what—but I'm losing."

"Not me, Saxon. I'm an awfully faithful wench. And I've a very ruined feeling. I know I'll never get over you."

He turned her neat brown hands in his. He looked a long while at her profile, sprite-like, cut eagerly and with a song and passion in the full sweet lips.

"Lord," said he hoarsely, "I'll be longing for you. It seems strange to be leaving. You'll write often? I'll wait for that. I'll be frightfully disappointed if you fail. Jerry—"

She laid her cheek softly on his: "Every day. I'll have nothing else to do. Nothing else worth a moment's time."

She waited till he kissed her. With clasped hands they went out softly.

Then she was standing in the doorway, waving to him. And he came running back and looked at her face where the lashes were shiny and wet. He kissed them. She closed her eyes, felt his hands loiter on hers. . . . He was gone.

CHAPTER X

She poured herself out in her letters—ardent, audacious things.

Once Marza coming in as she was sealing an envelope, stooped down and twined the topknot on her finger. She kissed Jerry and seemed very sad.

"You don't know what he writes back, Marza, darling," said Jerry, shrugging happily. To herself she murmured: "Worth the pangs! Worth any pangs!"

All through the winter it was like this. Burning phrase for phrase: "If I'd ever dreamed I would be as sunk as this, not all the futures in the world would have packed me off without you. Last night, Jerry, if I could have had you for one hour I'd have walked before the firing squad gaily when the hour was up. I wish now that I'd managed to take you. I would, if I'd known!"

A paragraph like this echoed and echoed. At odd moments she found herself smiling and repeating it—even planning to fly off to Europe at once—get the money somehow.

Spring came. A brightness stole into his writing—a sketch here and there of the artist fellows he met. One day happening down the boulevard he ran plump into John Ivers—she remembered him. And there was John sitting in the middle of the street with his canvas and palette, holding up the Parisian traffic while he did his sketching. Wonderful the understanding of these amiable gendarmes!

"Paris is wonderful in April. I'd read about it, but you'd think the whole world had burst into blossom, the parks and the country out a bit are all in gorgeous decoration. Now is the time you should be here. All winter, Jerry, I kept waiting for you to write and say you were coming over.

"Remember that book about George Sand you gave me to read? Well, I fancied you might come like that, masquerading as a page, and we would see the world together. Dear woodland thing, the spring is awful without you. There are some woods not very far from here. I would take you there. I've never seen moonlight so enchanting. I sit under a tree and all I do is ache and long—for you." For days after this she had no interest in food—no interest in dancing. Not even a whistle now and then brightened Marza's living room.

But she was happy. She was lost in her happiness.

So the first year passed. The second was not so sweet. Whole weeks were filled with tumults. In the midst of a neglectful silence on Saxon's part, Heinie renewed his courting. Heinie was grown up now. His idolatry, which Jerry knew for the deep love of an honest and faithful spirit, made Saxon's happy-go-lucky assurance doubly infuriating.

Late in the autumn came the disconcerting news that Tess Willi was going to join the American art colony in Paris.

Jerry snickered in derision—Tess developing an arty streak!

But it wasn't so amusing when Saxon, eaten with loneliness and just recovering from a depressing attack of "flu" wrote enthusiastically:

"Jerry, what do you think has just happened? Awfully jolly. Tess is here. Nothing in months looked half so good as this face from home. We're all going down to the Quartier to dinner. Tess, John, Antoinette, and I. I told you about Antoinette, didn't I? She's the prettiest little French girl in all Paris. She reminds me of you—blue eyes and black hair. Only her eyes never get purple; they're never all flame and sweetness.

"But John is wild about her and she of him. Tess plans to stay a long while, so I suppose it's up to me to take her around—"

Two weeks later came this—tucked in a long, happy letter.

"Tess has bought the jolliest little French car you ever saw. It's larky to have a bus to take you wherever you want to go. She likes Antoinette and John, so the four of us get along

lovely. Tess is crazy to go into Spain; wants the four of us to go on a sketching tour. John and Antoinette are made for it—"

"If he goes," thought Jerry, feeling very pale and wild, "if he goes—"

She didn't finish the threat. She began visualizing them flying about romantic valleys of Spain, coming upon old Moorish castles, wandering here through long red-gold autumn days, soft, intoxicating nights.

If Saxon Rhodes went on this trip with Tess Willi it would, of course, be the end of things for her. She wondered how he dared write of it. Mustn't he know how the mere suggestion would inflame her?

She grew weak with her fury as she contemplated this brazen plan. Tess would, of course, consider herself very bohemian —one of the intelligentsia—one of the enlightened experimenters in love and life. All the while she would be counting on making her experiment permanent. Enmeshing Saxon—and for life!

The curse of it that Tess Willi had the money to live this golden adventure—but she, Jerry, must remain helpless, 6,000 miles removed from him!

She went walking about the reservoir, a white despair in her heart.

At the bench where they had sat that last night, their hands tucked so tremblingly together, she paused. "He won't go—of course he won't. Don't be silly!"

"But why shouldn't he? It's just a sketching tour. He can easily excuse it on that ground. Do you begrudge him a little fun just because you can't share it?"

She gripped the bench, shook it roughly: "I wouldn't go! I wouldn't even want to!"

"A man would!"

She sat down and clasped her hands tightly against her knees. She wished distractedly that she were near him; that she had, somehow, gone with him. The two years were leaping to an eternity that they would never bridge.

* * * * * * *

That night Marza was giving a dinner. Robert Caples had returned from a long ramble over Southern Europe. He sat next to Marza and smiled each time her eyes met his; smiled as though her mere look gave him a radiant joy.

"I wish I had what she's got!" thought Jerry, burningly. She wished she had a look that would reach across 6,000 miles and draw on Saxon Rhodes relentlessly as the mere thought of him drew on her.

Suddenly she found herself listening intently to Robert's talk. He was a fascinating man—an amateur musician who might easily have risen to the heights but for his utterly undisciplined and roving nature. Robert was homely with his slack blond hair and long, nervous features, rapacious—looking as though goaded with inner hungers. When he sat at the piano, or now, as he glanced at Marza, the wolf expression vanished. He became humble and boyish.

Jerry liked him because he was so violently alive—rude, intolerant, mercilessly sincere.

Robert was telling of a house party he had attended in Florence.

"Ann Pryor," said he, "and Sebastian Lee drove down from Paris."

"Together?" interjected Jerry like the firing of a shot.

"Yes."

"Married?"

Robert smiled. "Not particularly."

"It seems to be the vogue," said Jerry blandly and reaching over for Robert's cigarettes, "for men and women to run about Europe in this child-of-joy fashion. We should all move over!"

"We're doing better, aren't we? I was under the impression that your generation had brought the vogue to America."

"Oh, in the fifteen-cent magazines!"

"And in the summer resorts," put in Flo Arnold quietly.

"That," said Jerry swiftly, "is altogether different. I wasn't meaning gin-parties and all the messy things that happen at them. But the gay, careless way that people in Paris go off

on these expeditions together. Just as balmy and casual as though they were off for a cup of tea! It must be most delightful!"

"Patience," said Flo, shrugging. "We'll acquire grace with time. We're still quite parvenu and self-conscious—snatching at freedom but rating it sin. And terribly afraid we'll burn in hell for it. That's why we're all screaming at the tops of our voices that the world is going to smash. Always the way when a time-honored tradition like the corset or feminine chastity is passing and a new experiment whether it be suffrage for women or wild oats for women is under way.

"We didn't become bearded and childless with the franchise. Now, even those of us who yelled the loudest for our rights have to be urged to vote. In another twenty years we'll be just as casual and just as sane about our freedom. The majority will look back and wonder what in heaven's name all the hulabaloo was about."

"The French," said Robert, "have long since reached this stage. Love is not a question of morals any more than sleeping and eating are. The Parisian takes love sans matrimony as debonairly as he plucks a rose from his garden—because it is sweet."

"Americans," thought Jerry bitterly, "seem to acquire the belle air of it with the greatest ease the moment they set foot on Parisian soil. He'll go, of course!"

* * * * * * *

She thought of sending a withering ultimatum; she thought of writing frankly and furiously.

But by the time her word reached him they might be deep into Spain. This prospect made her grimly quiet.

"I can do nothing," she thought. "If he wants to go, I can't alter it. I can't make him faithful just by demanding it—"

She went about feeling that her whole life was in ruins.

"There will be a year more of this—this kind of suspense," she thought abruptly. "I won't endure it!"

"You haven't given him a chance. He didn't say he was going."

She was torn by this conflict.

And finally she wrote a long, eager, pitifully revealing letter, letting him see that her heart and soul were his—entirely.

"I shouldn't do this," she thought. "But I don't care!"

And she became buoyant, writing like this, feeling him near; seeing again his dream-sweet eyes; hearing his voice, huskily tender. "Oh, he loved her. No one had ever loved so gloriously, so completely before.

All her doubts vanished. They were baseless, unfair. She would wait—and trust to the uttermost limit. When you love—you do.

Sunday she went yachting with Heinie. End of the season. Evening—the tawny twilight vanishing rapidly to this soft, purple dusk that came around and about one tenderly—an embrace.

Jerry sat on the hatch, humming softly—all about her the languor and passion of the autumn night.

Her heart was terribly full—almost bursting. Where was he tonight? Thinking of her? Yearning for her?

What would she do if he changed? Sit lonely like this—always? Through a whole lifetime?

The boat was drifting to the shore—skimming in lightly, happily. The trees of Belvedere were dark and hooded against a sky the very color of lapis lazuli.

Life with Heinie would drift along dreamily, beautifully, like the boat. She recalled Marza's words and her own high, ardent answer: "Money! Safe bets! Heinie, who wants them? Not I, mother. I'm like you. Give me the rapture and the pangs—all or nothing—life!"

Yes!

Yet it was lulling and sweet on this soft autumn night, with a breeze warmer than summer sweeping them to land—sweet to feel a strong, kind hand—a hand you could rely upon—faithful always.

Couples rising from the deck—sleepily like figures in a dream

—silhouettes kissing, moving on in shadowy embrace. Jerry and Heinie sitting on the hatch alone a moment.

"Jerry, I wish I could do something for you. I'd like to be awfully good to you. Stand by and see you through—you know—anything you wanted."

She smiled absently.

"Jerry, would you kiss me—just once—really?"

She turned her face to him and with a gulp took the sacramental kiss he offered.

Yet all her thoughts were crystallized. She took a parting glance toward Tamalpais vanishing in silver mists. She felt that she was saying goodby to many, many things.

The next afternoon when she came from school, she found a letter from him. It was postmarked "Spain."

CHAPTER XI

"SPAIN" . . . Jerry stared at the postmark. She had neither strength nor wish to open the letter. She let it fall to the bureau and went over dully and leaned against the window.

The sun was dazzling on the water—a bonny day. Seagulls swooping to a ferry made a splendid flash with their white, swift wings.

"Oh, it's lovely out," she thought forlornly.

He has gone—after all her hoping, he had gone.

An hour later she came back grimly and opened the letter. With a kind of resolute defiance—daring him to hurt her she began to read.

And became giddy—began to laugh—shakily.

"Here we are, darling girl, after many complications. Neither Tess nor the fascinating Antoinette are among those present. I fear our dear Tess will be deeply grieved, as we've stolen a march behind her back. But it's all turned out for the best, n'est-ce pas? Antoinette's mother became ill and she had to go home in a great hurry. John went with her. And Tess was for carrying me off to the Alhambra alone, except for such protection as blind, old Aunt Amy can furnish. I was a bit dubious, angel girl, about trusting myself with the forthright Tess. So I did some tall stalling, as the lady can be both obtuse and persistent—a bad combination for mere man.

"So Tess flew off in a pique to Vienna. The following eve, John having returned, we left for Madrid. There are three of us. A most engaging Englishman, Rupert Stallings, a writer, is along.

"He wants to see the bullfights, as he intends to use such a scene for the climax of a story.

"It's too bad you can't be along, Jerry. What a wealth of opportunity for you! And what joy as we sauntered along together. But I'm glad Antoinette isn't here. The only times I get homesick now are when I see her and John going off of an evening together. I told you she's like you—only less—much less.

"I got the snapshots. Are you really as sweet as all that, Jerry? As sweet—as young—as dear? I'd give anything to see the blue of your eyes. And more than anything for half a dozen kisses. You're one grand reason, girl, why I'll be awfully glad to get home again."

She grew silly with delight. She thought, "I'd wait a million years—ten million. I'll never doubt again—NEVER!"

* * * * * * *

In December she had a piece of extraordinary good fortune. She earned $150 making panels for the spring opening of an exclusive shop. She went quite wild over this and wrote hilariously.

By the time he returned she would have built up an immense, profitable clientele. They could marry at once. He wouldn't need to worry over waiting and earning.

* * * * * * *

Spring came early that year, with tulips—great crimson tulips—in their garden on the porch. Acacia trees were yellow in thick clusters about the reservoir. When she looked from Marza's window she saw them etched against clear, buoyant skies.

She wrote to him and wished that he were here.

He wrote and wished more wildly she were there.

"Much lovelier than last year. There's only one thing wrong about it—you're not here. You should be here. We're going off soon on a ramble all through France. There are things I want to see. Stallings is coming with us. There will be John and Antoinette. We haven't told Tess. And I hope she doesn't hear of it and trot along. Enough of Tess is plenty.

"John and Antoinette have the most joyous understanding. They're free as birds and wild about each other. And they've

had two precious years. Well, it's all right if one is immortal to keep waiting and losing. Waiting IS losing! All we have is the NOW. If we don't take this, we've nothing. This is their philosophy, and it seems to work out to everyone's peace and joy. Why is an emotion worthy only when it carries a guarantee that can't guarantee to last forever? In a world of perpetual change, of borning and brevity and dying, why such ironic homage to permanence?

"There's the fragrance of hyacinths invading this window, and in the room below a girl is singing. I'm a little mad, Jerry dear, with the spring flowers and wanting—wanting you. But suppose we'd had these years—all this color and richness shared! It would be ours always—this much at least. I love you terribly."

She read this again and again with strained heart and moist, burning eyes. That letter of his was a call.

She wrote back one of the bold, infinitely young letters that puzzled his mind and lit fires in his senses.

"Why in the world didn't you get your brave hunch to carry me all over Europe, your companion of joy, before this belated hour? All my life I've wanted to do just such stirring, danger-mad things. Oh, why is the world not rightly managed! Why could we not have seized this glorious adventure? I'm for Antoinette when it comes to living blazingly, riotously, daringly. And in the here and now!

"Everyone who believes in life must believe in this kind of life. Otherwise you are a champion of suicide—spiritual or physical. What's the odds, except that you get decently buried for the one and go about an animated emptiness in the other?

"Oh, Saxon, why am I not in France: why am I not this moment under a golden tree, you beside me in the heavenly wilderness? Enough without the jug; without the book! The fault is yours! You're just a year and a half too late in asking me. Did you not know you had only to speak and I would have followed: that your wanting a thing and sanctioning a thing, makes it right for me?"

Jerry pondered that last line and told herself with a pang:

"The terrible thing is that it's true!" He had this incredible power.

But suppose she had gone and they had had these mad, sweet years together?

The two years would be drawing to a close now, but they would have been intense and dazzling, with supreme moments to last as long as memory. When she was an old, old woman —though, of course, she never really believed that she, TOO, could grow old—but when she had lived a long, long time, there would still loiter about her this perfume from a radiant past.

Two precious years vanishing now—allowed to slip away because one has the hope of gleaming future years—years filing young and provocative through shining gates of an endless future.

Future years become the present. They also vanish!

She closed her eyes sharply on this thought. Yes—vanish, if one is fool enough to let them!

She wouldn't! Seize them—somehow.

She became restless, excited, burning. This menace of a long, painful postponement was often creeping into her dreams now. He had hinted this. The high years lost in waiting—fervor dimming. No—not for her!

* * * * * * *

She worked. Early and late. For a dream rose and grew splendid in her thought.

She had an order for six posters from an advertising concern—the beginning perhaps of that blessed future they would make together.

She wrote naïvely: "Six posters! It means that my average, if I'm only lucky—and I always have been—consider meeting and vamping you! Well, it means that my average might easily be $100 a month. Think that's enough for my part of a double blooming? I love you. And wish for autumn days, for red-gold nights and red-gold kisses. Oh, save a hundred thousand."

* * * * * * *

"You're putting quite a flash in that," said Sylvia Page, looking over Jerry's shoulder. "Don't waste yourself on commercial work."

"One must eat."

"Yes—but you don't have to do an advertising poster with the fervor of a Whistler."

Jerry thought, concealing a beaming laugh: "This isn't a poster. This is a symbol. Of love and a two-fold flowering!"

* * * * * * *

In the middle of June came a sudden, exciting, wholly unexpected message.

"Dear Jerry: Arrived in New York today. Left Paris suddenly without time to cable. Leave at once for home. Five days more. Love. Saxon."

Five days more! She went about delirious with expectance. Frightened—singing—lost. In the midst of a traffic jam she came to an abrupt halt—five days more! It was a mercy she wasn't run over, the way she had to stop now and then for these radiant sighs.

As the days dwindled and there was but the last night of waiting, she was in a panic—What had brought him home suddenly? Would he be the same? She recalled him in the moment of farewell running back for that inspired moment—his lips so tender on her eyes.

Ah—she would know the moment she looked at him—know when those light thrilling eyes turned on hers if his heart had changed.

CHAPTER XII

Dreary Port Costa—stretch of vacant land grown with stubble on either side of the railroad tracks. A girl in blue with lavender collar and lavender cuffs, stepping along jauntily; flinging her head with an eager flash.

She was afraid of this first moment. Would it be as high, as heavenly, as sweet—oh, as one dreams such things shall be?

She was always sure afterwards that he wasn't laughing when he grabbed her so swiftly to him, hiding his face for an instant against her own. He was crying—a happy kind of cry, but he swept a hand across his eyes and said huskily: "Hello there! Jerry!"

It was always sweet to think of this.

They said very little. She found it easier and more eloquent just to tuck her hand in his and to steal long, happy glances at his face.

He was thinner, a tightened look about him, the fighting face strengthened. Not as careless. Something of the boy gone. Yet he seemed sweeter to her—finer.

She looked darker to him and more winsome; a little appealing sprite, sitting beside him, her hand tucked happily in his.

She wanted to hear his voice—just the sound of it saying commonplace, everyday things.

"And, Jerry, two years is a mighty long time away from things you want."

"Might you be meaning one wild Jerry King?"

"Darling thing! You haven't changed. I was so afraid."

* * * * * * *

Evening. They found that bench at the reservoir where they had spent the hour of farewell.

The trees were the same, murmuring with a pleasant sound

like running water, and the moon threw a broken silver column in the pool.

He thought, kissing her, finding her lips so warm and sweet: "God, no wonder I was lonely!" He wanted her, loved her—wild and dear with her little brown hands clasping his face. He had come home for this.

* * * * * * *

The first days were all the same . . . an intoxication.

She went about in a dream, content to have things drifting in this radiant interlude.

One night she went to his office. They were going to dinner together.

"Wait a few moments, will you? I want to get this hunch set down—" He stood at his draughting board.

Paul was to build a church—a magnificent sanctuary. He had brought Saxon home for this undertaking.

Saxon was on fire with it, throwing himself into the task with the fervor of a medieval saint. "A temple to the one Great God," he told Jerry. "A temple to Beauty. A church should be this—surely."

He sketched on and on. She found a book and became interested, but now and then studying him. She was envying him this urgent hour. She recalled that anecdote told of Whistler and the friend who was to take him to the dinner of the great duchess. The friend waited. Whistler painted. The dinner hour came and passed. And finally the friend gently asked: "Don't you think you'd better stop! We'll be frightfully late!"

"Stop?" shrieked Whistler, "when everything is going so beautifully? Go and stuff myself with food when I can paint like this? Never! Besides, they won't do anything till I get there—they never do!"

Paint on—write on—though the house burns, the mountains fall—and the girl of dreams grows old and dies—

"But it's the only way," thought Jerry, trembling. "It comes first. It must or not at all."

She was filled with a great pride in him, glad to see him

working in this abandoned fashion, forgetting her, forgetting himself. She thought "Somewhere, mercifully far back, I must have a puritan ancestor. I like to see people starve and burn for an ideal. Oh, God—he will do the great, flaming thing!"

She pictured herself behind him urging him on—the two of them achieving together—oh, brilliantly, tenderly—upward and onward.

He turned suddenly to find her gazing at him with rapt, young eyes and parted lips.

She moved toward him, taking a place very close to him at the table.

"What were you doing, looking like that, Jerry?"

"Worshipping."

"Me?"

"No—the way you were working." She regarded his sketch critically. Then softly: "I like it. Oh, those spires!"

His heart leaped. It was so dear having her standing next him like this—intent, fiery, understanding. He put his arm suddenly about her, adoring the young, ardent profile.

"Jerry," said he solemnly, "I've kept you waiting two hours."

"I found a good substitute that I've been wanting a long time—'Steeplejack.'"

"Hungry? It's after nine."

"Just about starved."

He went over and got his hat. Then he came abruptly and turned her to him. "Jerry," said he, "if I didn't owe this money to Paul, if I didn't have this to meet—if I had one damn prospect, do you know what I'd do?"

His hands were harsh on her shoulders, his eyes blazing. Fire ran through her—glad, singing fire: "Elope? Oh, I'd love that—love it."

She stood on her toes, raising her face to his. "You will pay back the money. You will have me still—always—if you want me—"

He looked extremely like a boy as he stood there blinking, swallowing. Suddenly he pulled her to him with a short laugh,

and mumbled incoherent words that were sweeter than any music. He loved her—wanted her.

For days—for weeks she went about in a happiness high as flute notes—superlative, unreal, astonishing—the lark at heaven's gate singing.

CHAPTER XIII

SATURDAY afternoon—Montgomery street deserted. At the corner of Pine before that old dilapidated studio building, Jerry waited.

Then she saw him swinging along, jaunty, look of a sun-god about him. Eyes full of hidden mirths; voice humming with secret hilarity.

"Grand day for crime, girl!"

"Or any blissful thing."

"I love you!"

"Thanks."

Home two months now; work going great and the dear wild woodland thing at his side! Life's O. K. Nothing to worry about. Future only comes a day at a time. Ever think of that?

They were going to tea in John Iver's studio. John, too, was home. So it was all very gay, teaing about here and there, talking of brilliant tomorrows; living the care-free to-days.

Down the rattly old wooden stairway came now the sound of defiant music. They opened the door into John's vast empty loft. In one corner was a big screen hiding the kitchen; in another, a piece of gray burlap fenced off John's couch. The walls were covered with canvases and charcoals and a smoky fire gave a cheery home note.

The room's one treasure, from John's standpoint, was an ancient square piano draped with a gaudy Indian print. The piano came around Cape Horn as a wedding gift from John's grandfather to his bride—one of the first pianos, all of rose-wood, to arrive in San Francisco.

Robert Caples tuned and tinkered with it till he brought back

the echoes of a rich, deep voice. And John revered the gallant old instrument, he said because it was sad like an old woman with a brilliant past.

There were two girls in John's studio, Inga Brent, who now sat at the piano crooning an old negro melody, and Sylvia Page.

No one ever understood the friendship between these two—Sylvia who was so fiercely good. And Inga who was subtle, and fascinating, and a gypsy.

Sylvia and John now poked heads from behind the screen, whence the smell of burning cinnamon permeated the room. John's idea of a royal feast was this: Gallons of weak tea; piles of cinnamon toast not necessarily burned, and a jar of orange marmalade.

With a grin that showed two rows of marvelous white teeth, he now laid plates on a sawed-off card table. John was lovable with blue, sparkling eyes and curly brown hair. He had a rippling mouth, a trifle weak with its droop at the corners, but engaging, none the less.

"We were talking," said he, summoning the party to the table with a flourish of the arm, "of heaven and hell."

"Nothing of the kind," interrupted Sylvia. "We were talking of the younger generation. John, being now twenty-six and on the verge of senility is qualified. He went to a party of jeunes filles last evening and learned some new tricks from gay ladies of fourteen years!"

Having hurled this bomb, Sylvia sat back to muse and to listen. A contradictory person—Sylvia Page, who was so fiercely good, yet full of quaintness and humor. You didn't expect quaintness in Sylvia for she was tall—a beautiful, virile figure with long, sinewy lines and a proud air like an Amazon.

Not handsome, and certainly not pretty. Yet to Jerry, extremely attractive. Sylvia had eyebrows that met over her nose and went slanting off toward her temples. Very black eyebrows. And sea-gray eyes usually squinted together. Because of this, when she opened them, as she infrequently did, one received a shock. They were such clear, delightful, friendly

eyes. They seemed to say naïvely: "I'm an awfully nice person. Take a little trouble and find me out!"

Girls heeded this lure of Sylvia's. Men didn't. For Sylvia was too intelligent and too honest to go in for the tricks that pass as sex appeal, even with clever men. She had too much humor and too much self-esteem. She would have felt contempt for the men she could so delude. She knew her inner fires and that they were fine. She felt a scorn for men because they were so easily hoodwinked by externals and counterfeits.

Yet Sylvia adored Inga. And Inga was one of those girls who bloom in the presence of the male.

Said Inga: "I'm glad I was born in 1900 instead of 1910. In my prime the lavender touch was still unusual enough to be intriguing. And men wondered whether they could or couldn't. The certainty of the chase today must make it awfully flat and boresome to the sporty hunter.

"Come John and play. The world grows melancholy. I'm moved to song."

But John went on cramming his mouth with cinnamon toast and insisting on argument. They were all talking at once—each with a separate theory and all wild-eyed because no one would listen.

"The part that infuriates me," Sylvia now shouted above the din, "is the pitiful display of the herd instinct.

"These kids of sixteen"—Sylvia was twenty-three—"think they're rebelling. They're not! They're a pack of shabby little imitators screaming 'Be yourself!' and not having the remotest idea what their real self is. They can't possibly all like the foul gin they're drinking. Surely some of them must despise being mauled. But they go in for it because it's the fashion just as fainting and hoop-skirts were the fashion of their despised grandmothers.

"If there was a real rebel among this youngest generation, she'd wear her skin white and her eye-lashes unpainted. And she'd cut loose from all this SEXATION and say prayers on the top of Twin Peaks. That would be a real rebel for you!"

"For God's sake, be your age, Sylvia, and shut up! You're

suffering from unsatisfied yearnings and you're jealous. It doesn't take a complex-expert to see that!"

Inga hurling this cheerfully, came gliding to Sylvia's side and kissed her lightly.

"I want to dance! Whistle for me, Jerry."

Inga danced with the spirit of a pagan nymph. She was an odd girl with a dazzling pink and white skin, a turned-up nose and wide, vivid, joyous mouth. She had thick red hair and extraordinary black eyes that were now languid and dream-haunted.

In a moment this mood vanished. She became raucous—a coon shouter doing the "Black Bottom"—stamping and shrugging—gleefully bold and inviting.

John, moving as though in answer to Inga's taunt and fire, took his place at the piano. He played. In a moment Inga swung herself to the top of the big, square box and sitting there with her back to John, sang delicately, softly—as though to him alone.

The room was filled with shadows made mysterious by the colors of unfinished canvases on the walls. Sylvia stood before a bookcase restlessly turning pages of book after book.

"She feels it too," thought Jerry, terribly moved by this soft, flame-lit song of Inga's and by the deeps of her husky, passion-stirred voice.

Across the room she saw Saxon. He was standing before a painting . . . trees blowing in a storm. The jaunty look was gone from his face. It might have been the shadows that made him so excessively pale.

He came moving over to Jerry, pressed her hand on the table: "It's getting late—we better go."

"Yes," said Jerry nodding. She was thinking of Inga, who was in love with John. Wondering of Inga.

They went down the rattly old stairs into the clear summer evening. And silently, because both were filled with thoughts, started walking northward along Montgomery up hills as steep as walls.

They circled around to the just completed esplanade crown-

ing the old Pioneer Park. They leaned on the stone bulkhead and looked out to the Golden Gate where the sun was just setting.

Said Jerry: "John is a glorious tramp, isn't he? Last spring it was a ramble all over France. And now in this heavenly Indian summer it's this excursion into the Tuolumne meadows."

"Yes, but tramping is his vocation. He'll be working and thinking and storing up impressions every moment of the time."

But Jerry went on dreamily: "I saw moving pictures of those meadows last New Year's when we were in Yosemite. It's the most beautiful country in the universe. Oh, the flowers —and the sound of the name—Tuolumne meadows—sheer music, isn't it?"

Then abruptly, voicing the unrest of her heart: "How will John like traveling alone after his spring promenade de joie?"

"Others will be along—Rod, I believe. And Inga."

"Inga!" Jerry grew pale. "Is Inga going with John?"

The sun was gone; the sky abloom with fuchsias—royal fuchsias that began to drop in glowing masses on the islands and the mountain tops.

Jerry looked down the quarry, chopped in a perpendicular wall, 400 feet to the street below. A sense of danger excited her.

"Ah—so Inga is going with John."

"I thought you knew. I thought everyone knew. It's quite obvious that she's in love with John."

A ripple of soft, taunting laughter flung in Saxon's face. "You can be in love with a person without running away with him!"

"Not Inga."

She grew silent, folding her arms moodily on the stone. "What became of Antoinette? Was she broken-hearted when John left her?"

"She left him. Or, rather, she was summoned home and married to a very rich and respectable French banker."

"I thought she and John were wild about each other!"

"They were. But in France, marriage is one thing and love another. This marriage was extremely desirable from the family standpoint. Antoinette knew it was inevitable . . . sooner or later."

"So she took her love first?" Jerry closed her eyes and drew a smothered, excited breath. "At least, she's sure of something."

She pictured that springtime ramble of John and the vivid French girl he loved—the girl who was like herself with lavender eyes, as John called them, and blue-black hair.

Hotly, the young, singing mouth stormy: "She was right! What had Antoinette to gain by denial? They would have married her anyway, and she would have lost the one season of living—lost the one glowing superlative experience she may ever know.

"And twenty or forty years hence they would have buried another mortal who was born and died but never had the courage to LIVE!"

"Jerry!" His face white, tense, staring into hers, eyes warm and startled: "Jerry—"

She gazed back, mute, oblivious. The tumult went on in her thoughts. "That's one way to solve Life. High-hat it! Why not? They double-crossed us when they put in the one body a mind that calculates and senses that clamor. It must have been a god of dissension who thought up this grand little house divided against itself—the human experiment."

Her lips parted, a dangerous fire in her eyes. "Antoinette was right! She chose wisely. And whatever happens now, she's not been cheated!"

She sighed and leaned, listless, against the bulkhead.

Said Saxon, very quiet: "Right—yes, since Antoinette was lucky enough to have chosen John. With some one else there might have been many things besides a joyous memory to recall her adventure."

"Well, Papa!"

"Consequences are the everlasting rebels. You can neither

control nor predict them. Antoinette was right because she was lucky.

"She might easily have acquired a taste for that kind of life. There are girls who do. The first four or five Aprils may be fair enough. The end is always horrible."

"Then I better not kidnap you!" She sunk her chin in her hands, looking like a slim, dejected sprite.

She thought furiously, feeling with bitter-sweet pain his arm about her waist: "Why am I so disturbed? Why would I like to take his hand and run millions of miles? I wish I could get out of this. Out of it!"

Then exultantly, fiercely: "I never will! I never, never will!"

"Jerry," said he softly, sensing her violent unrest: "I thought you'd wait a thousand years."

She glanced across the bay to the ripple of foam in a boat's wake; to the lighted amber stalactites going down in caves of water.

"A thousand years, Saxon? Ten thousand! Only that you're not willing to wait. Only that!"

The dark and the hush fell about them in a dreaming peace. She waited—smiling. As he kissed her, she thought happily: "It's because no one has ever loved as I love! No one before!"

Now she added, listening to the sweet fervid incoherence whispered against her lips: "He too! He too—"

* * * * * * *

Lately she had troubled over this. He seemed so acquiescent to his situation—even content in it. More and more immersed in his work.

The edge of his loneliness was wearing away. And the moods of stormy yearning for her less thrillingly expressed.

This frightened her. She thought: "Does he care as much? He's not as impatient as I? Oh, why is it always the girl who wonders—the girl who waits?"

* * * * * * *

One day toward the middle of October he drove out in the

late afternoon to show her the site for the church they were to build. He was in that humming, happy mood that acted on her like an elixir. Work going along magnificently.

"No thrill in the world, is there, Jerry, like the joy of achievement? Beating your brain—making it produce. Look—here's the front elevation—facing those hills. . . ."

She glanced into his tanned, fervid face now so eagerly lighted and thought with a leaping pride: "He feels as I felt when I got the sunlight on the canvas!"

And she knew that he must succeed first, for his work and he were one. If it failed, he failed. This intrinsic success was utterly necessary—the cornerstone for any edifice of happiness he was ever to build.

"I didn't think I was going to get it just this way. Will it be fine?"

Tucking his hand in her arm: "Paul's letting me handle the whole thing. Isn't he a prince? As soon as I've paid off this $5,000 I owe, he's going to take me into partnership."

"And then?"

"Then work—work—WORK!"

"Oh, thrilling!"

But there came catapulting upon her the whole mountain of obstacles between them—this success that he must win.

This debt that he must pay.

This fear of a marriage made in love and ended in poverty.

He must succeed first. She must succeed. And years from now, when they were secure; when the flash and fervor were dimmed, they could love!

Why were they not arrogantly bucking life? Joyously defiant—seizing it—living it?

This is the brave way—the beautiful way. Dare and be! Today—now!

Three years since that night of wonder and moon-mist—that young, sweet night in Monterey.

They would wait three more. For all anyone knew, thirty more!

CHAPTER XIV

Saxon took off his hat, letting the breeze, as it came singing round the hills, ruffle his hair. He was making the preliminary survey for a house he was to build.

Beautiful slope here with that distant view of the ocean. He would save as many trees as he could . . . build the house around the garden.

Just across the way in this new section of St. Francis Woods was that little Spanish house he had built before he went to Europe. The great cathedral window in the living room faced him. He remembered the night Jerry came to his office, he showed her these plans. And she insisted on this lovely window. He had wanted to marry Jerry, then—before he went away. Young and wildly sweet—his if he cared to claim her. He had railed against the ambition he knew would make a slave of him.

Today he no longer railed. His course was irrevocably chalked. He loved his work. It was his inner self. He exulted in it and resented only what hampered him.

Yet as he drove slowly through the trees this morning of a sparkling February, spring thrilling in the tender grass and budding flowers, he thought achingly, "God—I wish we could!"

In a garden he saw a girl with black, curly hair, snipping roses. He thought, again, longing: "Oh, Lord!"

His senses were assailed with the sunlight and perfume. Against all these clean new houses were hedges of fragrant stock—beds of hyacinths—pink and purple hyacinths, exhaling their penetrant loveliness.

He remembered last spring—hyacinths invading his window. How he had wanted Jerry then. On any terms.

And she would have come to him! She wrote back that she would most gaily have come.

Last night—only last night he reminded her of this fiery avowal. He said laughing, but drawn by the lure of her as she went whistling and taunting about the room: "You knew I was 6,000 miles away. So you were safe to say it."

She came up to him, the sweet, flower-blue eyes flinging into his with a song and a sob: "What do I hide now that you're here? I meant it. Oh, the power you have on me, Saxon Rhodes! You well know that I meant it."

He drew in a long, heated breath and drove slowly round the winding slopes—higher. The houses were fewer.

He was seeing Jerry as she flung her hands to him with that little faint laugh, the young sweet eyes closing. He was feeling her fresh, soft lips moving on his. His heart thumped. It was so warm here—so hushed—so redolent with perfume and song. He murmured, hoarsely, the blood hot about his neck: "We should! God—we should!"

* * * * * * *

Suddenly it occurred to him like an inspiration that Amy lived just around the next turn. He would go and visit Amy. Amy was his favorite sister—an eager, brilliant girl. In his excitement he now thought of her as she was five years ago. He was not quite twenty-two then and secretly wild with envy of this girl, who was just a year his senior. For she had written two stories that were accepted. She had earned $150. And she had flung herself into this mad, beautiful love affair with Donald Gray. Seized it while it was fresh and sweet and high. She was always like that.

Since his return he had only seen her three or four times at the family dinners.

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The neat stuccoed house—one of a block of stuccoed toy bungalows—was set back twenty feet. Lawn nicely mowed—gay yellow daffodils in a perky row right up to the front door. The milk bottles set out in order.

His spirits rose. Amy made a go of it!

The door opened precipitously to his ring.

"Oh! Who in the world would expect you this time in the morning!" The anger in Amy's face flashed to a beaming pleasure. "Come in, Saxy—will you have a cup of coffee? Stay for lunch?" And imagining his eyes on her spattered apron, she doubled it hastily under her arm. "I'd certainly have dolled if I'd dreamed you were calling. I've just finished the daily line of wash.

"Stay, won't you? We'll have the coziest old chat—"

Bang—clatter—bang! As though the house were collapsing.

"Good God—what's that?"

Amy laughed, "Just your nephew committing his daily atrocities."

A boy of four came stamping down the stairs, a girl of three pulling at his shirt and screaming loudly for aid. "Buster," said Amy emphatically, "pick up every one of those blocks and give them to sister. Now go into the sun room and play nicely."

Happily to Saxon: "I went up to see the lot where you're to build. Wouldn't I adore to be up there with a big walled-in garden, where I could turn these young savages loose?"

A scream from the sun room followed by a dismal howl from the cat and sister bawling piteously: "Stop hitting me —stop hitting me!"

"It's not always as bad as this!" said Amy, flying down the hall. "Buster, give the kitty to Marjorie. And stop teasing. Shame on you! A big boy of four!"

The big boy of four surrendered the cat, smiled blandly, his hands deep in his pockets as he mustered resources for his next move.

"Really, once in a while they're angels," said Amy, returning breathless and flurried. "They take it out of you when they're not—which is most of the time, I suppose. Listen to that—! Sometimes I get murderous!"

"How's the writing, Amy? Have you done anything lately?"

"No," said the girl wearily. "I don't even think about it."

"You should! You're just as much out of tune scrubbing

and washing as I'd be. What's become of your fire, letting yourself get into a rut?"

Amy looked at her hands—blinking—sudden, idiotic tears flying to her eyes.

"Why don't you hire a nurse—or a cook and take the time for it?"

"Hire a nurse on a newspaperman's wage? Don't be silly! Besides, Don is writing in the evenings now. I tried to, but I'm just dumb by the end of the day.

"They say no house is big enough for two families. I'm beginning to think no house is big enough for two careers. Somebody's got to be the background. In this case it seems to be Amy!"

The nail of the third finger was broken to the quick. She rubbed it and made a valiant effort to smile. "You've caught me in a rotten mood, Saxy dear. I'll get over it in the next forty years. Then I'll be like dad. You know his marriage was just one long bliss. But I often heard ma's side of it. And she was no quitter—was she? And they were happier a thousand times than most—of the people today.

"You know none of dad's five children ever bit or slapped another. They never cried or grabbed the table cloth all set with dishes to the floor. We were all little angels. Looking forward we think it will be like that—all roses and music for us. And looking back we kid ourselves that it was. The prospect thrills: The retrospect mellows. And the only hard part comes in between—in the living of it!"

"But I wouldn't give up the writing, Amy. You've got real talent. Look what Mary Roberts Rinehart did. And she has three sons. So you can make a go of it!"

"Her husband was a doctor—not a newspaper rewriteman. And after all, she was Mary Roberts—not Amy Rhodes. I don't believe they were ever hard-pressed. It's all right to sneer at money when you have it. It's not a bit important then. But money can be the cruelest and most tyrannical thing on earth to the fellow who hasn't got it!

"Don't you fool yourself, Sacks! No one ever loved more

than Don and I loved. You know that. But it burns up your fine fervor trying to make both ends meet. You don't stop loving, I suppose—but you do stop rejoicing."

She laughed softly, putting her hand affectionately on his arm: "How is she, Saxy? Just as pretty—just as sweet? Well, she won't thank you four years from now, when she's hanging out the family wash. I don't care how attractive you are! Get your future settled first—both of you."

"Don't be silly, Amy! She'd love me if I had forty feet and she had to darn socks for all of them!"

She followed him to the door, saying wistfully. "I hope there's going to be one in our family who gets what he wants! I hope you won't get reckless, Saxy, and think you can do what no one else has ever done."

He grinned: "But you know there IS Mary Roberts Rinehart!"

She nodded absently—sadly.

When he got into the car, he pulled his collar loose—stifling.

CHAPTER XV

The male is instinctively opposed to marriage just as the female instinctively seeks it. In Saxon this reluctance, especially since his return, was heightened by another—the fear of the artist that he will be lost in the husband.

Jerry grew increasingly, despairingly conscious of a subtle hostility. It flashed out in chuckling, derisive comments against women the wasters and men the mops. He delighted in pointing out the absurd delusions of love and the warping viciousness of family life. Who that is free should take unto himself a jailer whose synonym is wife and build for himself a prison house which is marriage?

Their social life supplied him ammunition in plenty. Every day one or another of the couples whom they knew and who were supposed to be perfectly mated, took the path to the divorce courts. Under their very eyes, married friends carried on spicy affairs. And only the "flat tires" were happy and moral—too stupid, perhaps, to feel their doom.

It was all very discouraging to a young girl wildly in love. At times, Jerry felt the whole world conspired to debauch Saxon Rhodes: drag him down to the low, comfortable levels: open his eyes to the aridness of virtue and the lunacy of love.

In February they went to the Four Arts Ball, a picturesque, bacchanalian revel. Jerry went as Carmen. Surveying her image she informed Marza: "I look a dream. And, oh mother, I feel high as the mountains and deep as the sea tonight."

They were in hilarious spirits. At John's where they went for cocktails, Saxon whispered: "Tonight, Carmen, you lose your soul!"

She flashed back recklessly: "To you, Apache, gladly!"

At the table, in the Fairmont Hotel where the revel was held, their gaiety was a little dimmed by the open quarreling of Hal and Vera Stacey. These two were married four years. They had eloped after a young romantic infatuation, were still held up as the model couple and still believed madly adoring each other.

Hal began by commenting on the food—comparing it with the cafeteria hash served by his wife: went from this to ironic mumbling about the parasite women of today. Vera tried to laugh it off with a high-keyed: "Of course we use you! Brain always uses muscle. We're the clever sex all right, all right! Got you right where slaves belong. Under our little thumbs!"

The bickering took on a serious aspect when a tall, regal woman in Spanish costume appeared at the table and asked Hal to dance. Her mask left revealed a pair of dark, luminous eyes and a smile of magical charm.

Two hours later Hal returned, the senorita jauntily holding his arm. He was jovial and flushed. "Lo, Vee, ole dear," he greeted balmily. "Sha great time, huh? Like my little Spanish beauty?"

Vera's face drained. It just went flashing white. She picked up her high-ball and flung it, glass and all in her husband's face. A long, neat cut showed crimson.

Everyone tried to cover up, Hal slumping to a chair, Vera grabbing up her wrap: Saxon leading the senorita back to her own table.

"Come home!" ordered Vera.

As though he were deaf and totally oblivious of the furious figure confronting him, Hal gulped the hot coffee.

"Sit down, Vera," the girls begged.

She was past listening. Tears flew to her eyes. "You wait, Hal Stacey—you'll pay!" She made a flying dash to the lobby, two of the party following.

Hal poured himself a lavish measure of whiskey. He raised it grimly: "Here's how—matrimony!"

Jerry watched Saxon, who was now dancing with the cause of all the tumult. The senorita moved dreamily, her eyes half closed, a red, taunting smile on her lips.

"Who can she be?" asked Jerry wistfully when finally Saxon returned.

"Why don't you know? It's Ora Pringle."

The name brought a flash of pictures. Ora Pringle, fascinating, audacious and now almost legendary because of the thrill of her girlhood. She was three years older than Jerry. Jerry well remembered the day Ora, then sixteen, eloped with her father's secretary. They went to England. A year later Ora was divorced. She married a Swedish prince and in some mysterious, unknown manner acquired enormous but temporary wealth. Splendid tales filtered back to the Art School: tales of Ora's conquests: her triumphs in London society, her astonishing beauty.

Then word of her ceased. She was forgotten.

Now she was returned, divorced from her Swedish prince, penniless and with two children. All this Saxon learned, and told to Jerry as they sat in the quieter lower ball-room.

"Wasn't that a hell of a thing Vera did? Made Ora feel like ten cents on a wet day. God, these wives!"

"Don't indict the whole female sex because Vera Stacey has a fiendish temper."

"Women differ from each other: wives are all alike."

"Well, Solomon, with your five hundred, you should know!" Jerry sighed. "When we marry our love, we lose it. And if we don't marry it, we never have it. What is a wench to do?"

Without raising her eyes she perceived a shadow in the archway five feet from them. . . . A luring woman.

"Saxon—she's looking at you. She's waiting for you?"

"We have another dance some time tonight. Now, I suppose. There's Heinie. Shall I call him?"

Heinie advancing. Saxon resigning her swiftly, gliding away with that provocative figure clasped in his arms. And that red, magical smile almost touching on his lips.

Half an hour later Inga accosted Jerry and Heinie with a troubled: "Hal's passing completely out. We've got to get him home. Tell Sacks to drive him."

Said Jerry weakly: "All right. He's down the hall a way. I saw him a moment ago. There!"

She ran and whistled, reaching the elevator just a moment after the door slammed carrying Saxon and Ora to the rooms upstairs.

Heinie offered comfort:

"It's no use to follow, unless you know the room number. The upper floors are bedlam let loose. I'll drive Hal home. Please let me, Jerry."

An hour later—4 o'clock in the morning, Saxon helped a very subdued Carmen to the machine. The bracelets jingled. She slid them from her arms. She had a faint dread of the interview before them.

"Have a good time? Pretty gay, wasn't it?"

"In spots. Mostly noise, I thought."

Silence. After many blocks: "I'm sorry I wasn't around when you wanted me. Think you might have waited. You knew I wouldn't be gone long."

"I could have waited. But Hal couldn't.

"It was useless to try and find you in that upper story bedlam."

He turned with a dark flush: "Were you upstairs?"

"Several times. I wanted to see what goes on in this night of freedom."

He ignored this and informed through his teeth: "I got in with Ora's crowd and couldn't very well refuse when they ALL"—burning emphasis on the "ALL"—"went up for a drink."

"Then why so snooty because I got in with a poor sick friend and couldn't very well refuse to see him home?"

"You're blaming me!"

"For what am I blaming you?"

"For Ora!"

Jerry slumped against the cushions and whistled musingly.

"Do you imply, my dear wayward lover, that I've anything to fear from Ora? I admit she's a most risque and enchanting dame.

"But so am I. And she's too tall—an inch over your head. Such a masterful man as you wouldn't like that! You don't like them large-limbed and Amazonic—do you?

"But cute and clever and—" she gave a merry laugh and snuggled against his shoulder: "Is she as kissable as I?"

He met her eyes and blinked.

She was comforted by this. "Saxon, why should I be jealous? Real love is inevitable—like the affinity between chemicals. You're attracted by one and not by another. That's all there's to a genuine relation, simple and inexplicable as H_2O. Unless you want me more than you want any other woman in the world—I don't want you AT ALL—now or ever."

"Oh, God," said he somberly and bringing the car to a stop before Jerry's door, "why does it never work out? Jerry, why does every one think he has this kind of a love and every one find himself fooled?

"Vera and Hal Stacey loved. You remember—why, only four years ago! They were ready to steal—to slave—anything that they might have each other."

"They got a sudden deluge of money," answered Jerry quietly, "and everything became too easy and Vera didn't play square."

Said he bitterly: "Too much money ended it for Vera and Hal—and too little money is ending it for Amy and Don—one thing or another something ends it for every one—

"Do you realize, Jerry, that if we could have married when we wanted to—that September two and a half years ago, we'd be on the verge of slaying each other now—like them?"

She shut her eyes. Suddenly she gave a happy laugh; "I still think we'd be different!"

"And do you mean that about not being angry or jealous?"

She raised her face so that his eyes would look in hers. "Not jealous! Is anyone as fair as I? To YOU?"

"You are different!" said he, pulling her suddenly to him. "I'm sorry—oh, Jerry—I'm awfully sorry—"

"I don't care," said she. "Now I don't—don't care!"

She went whistling—light-hearted into the great empty living room. She walked about touching the books—pausing before a sketch Saxon had brought her from France.

"Isn't is lovely," she thought—then absently: "He kissed her and is sorry—"

A few days after this they were all at John's, chummily rehashing the scenes of the carnival. They talked of Vera and Hal who were reconciled and adoring each other again.

"All of that," said Inga contemptuously, "comes of these one-cylinder marriages. Why won't people who have nothing in common but a physical attraction face the fact and accept it?

"Because they are swept by this physical affinity, why must they attempt a spiritual, financial, residential and intellectual relation as well?

"The one-cylinder marriage is the most dishonest and fatal thing in this generation."

"And the prevailing kind," offered John.

They sat over the cinnamon toast and tea and gave glib theories for the solution of the world's troubles.

"But women like Ora Pringle are a thorn in the flesh of wives," said Sylvia, the long black eyebrows meeting over her nose. "They've no responsibilities and titanic audacity."

"Why," asked Inga, "are they not accepted for what they are—a gay dash of color in a drab world? I should think a wife would be willing to let her husband have a harmless flare at it now and then. . . ."

"The only time that sort of flare is harmless," remarked Jerry, wrinkling her nose in Saxon's face, "is when it goes out before it gets lit!"

"Oh, Ora's a good sort. You can't blame a woman of her type," went on the tolerant, easy-going Inga. "She's a kind of huntress. Men are her game—her legitimate game. She goes after them as inevitably as a cat goes after a mouse."

"And they love it!" added Sylvia bitterly. "They ALL fall for it—all of them!"

He too? murmured Jerry's fear.

A Friday . . . seven in the evening, she went to his office. She was just at the turn in the corridor. His door opened.

Ora Pringle came out.

CHAPTER XVI

Ora was very tall—a regal Juno with black, luminous eyes and head carried proudly.

With fast-beating heart Jerry watched the superb figure disappearing around the turn. Then she walked up one corridor, down another, fighting for self control. She wanted to fling through his door, hurl angrily: "I saw her! Poisonous female!"

She remembered suddenly a thing Marza was fond of saying: "The first error of the woman in love is to care the most: the last error is to let the man know that she cares the most!"

"Oh—but I hate this subterfuge—this playing a game! Why can't I fly in there and tell him to go to hell? Take her with him!"

Yes—why didn't she do this? Wasn't it the honest way? The courageous way? And the magnificent satisfaction of it!

She paused abruptly, tingling from head to foot with a sudden realization that she was only clamoring to do the utterly selfish thing. Her pride was hurt and she wanted only the honest animal satisfaction of hitting back and with twice the blow she had received.

Fling him to Ora Pringle? Make the way easy for a damn, dangerous adventuress? What could Ora bring him—what gift to make the sun god greater?

She went softly and opened the door.

He was standing at his draughting board and didn't turn as she entered. She noticed his neck redden and knew that his hand fastened rigidly on his pencil.

She took a light step.

"Oh, hello," said he, coming swiftly to her: "I thought it was Paul. Didn't expect you—darling kid—"

She shut her eyes as he stooped and kissed her.

"Will you wait? I'll only be a few moments."

"I'll watch if you don't mind. Is this table strong enough?"

"For a butterfly—yes."

She swung herself up and perched there with her thin long arms wound about her hunched knees.

She sat very still, watching his fluent hand and his rapt, intent face.

"Finished," said he at last. "Here . . ." picking up a diminutive and very delicate handkerchief. He sniffed it. "New perfume."

She blew a puff of smoke musingly, to the ceiling. "Not mine, darling. The dark lady of the mask dropped that."

He blushed hotly: "You saw Ora leaving?

"She's not interested in me. She's just hard up and came to ask my advice about getting a job."

"Why not an employment agency?"

"She's thinking of going into architecture and wants to get a chance at draughting. That's why she came to me."

Jerry bit the end from her cigarette. He was guileless enough to fall for that! Oh, man the pursuer! Innocent enough to swallow it—line, hook and sinker.

"I thought you said she had to support her children?"

"She does."

"You wouldn't recommend the career of architect to a starving sister or loveress, would you? If she wants to feed her kids why doesn't she go out for a real job like clerking or cooking or selling? If she wants them to try starvation why doesn't she go in for medicine or grand opera? Or she might have essayed portrait-painting or litterachure!"

"You're awfully facetious, aren't you?"

"Indeed not," said she, snuffing out her own cigarette and snatching his. "It's no laughing matter to see my own particular lord of creation in peril of being changed from the catch of the century to a portly papa of Swedish step-children overnight!"

"No fear. Besides," said he with a sudden chuckle, "that

wouldn't solve the bread and butter of it. And the children are with her mother in New York."

"So she's foot-loose," thought Jerry darkly, "foot-loose and after any attractive man who suits her fancy!"

* * * * * * *

As they sat at dinner he regarded her for a long while in silence. Then quietly: "Jerry, why is a woman always suspicious of other women?"

"They know them. Why is man the pursuer always flattered to become man, the trapped? Saxon—why does a man always figure that he has nothing to lose in an intrigue?"

"Because he hasn't!"

"Just as much as a girl. Perhaps more because he's so guileless—so unaware. He throws things away without knowing that he's reckless and squandering—till perhaps long afterwards. Too late!"

"Oh," thought she burningly, "he's lured by her. He thinks it harmless—his right! And he's going in for it!"

* * * * * * *

Before that hectic summer was done, Jerry's fear grew ominously. On many a day she came to his office and felt that Ora had preceded her. She knew that he called on her. She heard that they sometimes dined together. Not often, perhaps. But often enough. On many a night, she lay awake, telling herself starkly:

"He's not blazingly, toweringly certain that I'm his girl. But, oh, God, how sure I am that he and he only is MY man!"

This happened after half a dozen house parties that were all more or less alike. And all for Jerry King withering with pain and disillusion.

She dreaded these house parties. Things happened. Messy, unpleasant and rather appalling things when you thought of them afterwards. But all summer they'd been going to them.

You were supposed to have a wildly exciting, joyous time; to be LIVING in capital letters. But it was different from the

fervor and thrill one dreams about. Bitterly, hatefully different.

They were held—most of them, at Phil Cowper's country place high in the Santa Clara foothills. Phil was an architect, a charming, gifted fellow who might have made a name for himself if his father had but flung that half-million dollars in the gutter instead of handing it to Phil.

The house was a great, rambling place—like an old-country estate in the midst of enchanted gardens. The dance-hall open but columned with century-high redwoods; beyond this, the swimming pool to make whose sandy beach tons and more tons of white, dazzling Carmel sands had been contributed. A play-garden worthy of young spirited gods.

"Heavenly, heavenly," murmured Jerry on her first visit. And raptly in Saxon's ear: "What a dream of a place to hear the lark sing!"

"And see the moon flash. We shall!"

But each time she was disappointed. Each time Saxon had some excuse for his friends. Jerry would think "perhaps it will be different this time. Such a gorgeous, sweet blue day!"

Now it was August. They were going again.

Six o'clock, burnished and warm that August night. They went to John's for cocktails.

Saxon in the little screened-off kitchen was the bartender. He measured and tasted, added a squirt of grape-fruit, a twist more of lemon. No cook ever followed a more involved and elaborate ritual.

"Now if we had some real French vermouth this would be perfect."

"Oh, look out," warned Jerry, who was the humble assistant. "You'll have us all tight. And you've got to drive."

"Now, mama! Taking care of me already?" He poured in another pint of gin and carefully turning the shaker asked whimsically: "What makes a woman such an inveterate censor? How do you get that way—running the universe and so damn sure you know just how to do it?"

The eyes she found so compellingly beautiful beyond all other

eyes now laughed on hers. "You look sweet tonight, darling thing. I've got to kiss you!"

She took the tray and went a little unsteadily into the shadowy room. A mere look like this—a mere joyous phrase and she was swept like a bird to the mountain tops. It would be beautiful tonight—like that radiant midnight once in Monterey.

* * * * * * *

The gardens were in darkness when they drew up in the redwood grove before the great rambling house in the foothills. Stars twinkled in the topmost branches of the trees and already the moon began to rise.

The ten in the dining room were seated at the table when Saxon and Jerry; Inga and John; Sylvia and Rod Porter arrived.

Glasses raised—a shout of welcome.

Through the curtain of cigarette smoke Jerry saw a face—a pair of luminous dark eyes and a red, haughty mouth—Ora Pringle.

Six months since she had seen this face.

"The huntress," whispered Inga in Jerry's ear, "is with us. Who has she snared now?"

Ora had risen—she was smiling. The smile flashed like a little silver lightning across the room. "Come over here—by me—ole timer! Saxon!"

He laughed—moved to her chair.

She raised her glass and held it to his lips. Then she pulled him to her chair and with one arm about his shoulder took a sip from the glass—offered him one. She kept this up.

He acquiesced; he was charmed to sit on the edge of Ora's chair, sipping high-balls from her glass.

"I guess this leaves me the little green peach on the family tree," said Jerry sinking to a chair that someone now offered.

"Oh, how do you do?" said she pleasantly, a little heartened to find Hugh Hammond's genial voice delightfully greeting her.

An Englishman that she had met here two months ago and

whom she had liked immensely from the first glance in his thin, blond, intelligent face.

"You're late," said he, "and some seventeen rounds of cocktails behind the rest of us."

"Thank God for that! You see—" the words died in her throat for Saxon who had finished the second high-ball now waved his hand to her and called arrogantly: "Don't get sore! It's all right—eh, Ora?"

Ora leaned over and kissed him. Every one laughed.

This was the beginning of it.

* * * * * * *

"Mad?" said he when they were strolling to the dance pavilion an hour later. "Here, have a drink—you'll feel better."

Jerry took the flask, raised it to her lips and with a deft motion emptied it over her shoulder.

"Say—did you drink all that? You'll be laid out!"

"It's the first real drink I've had tonight. And I'm bound to keep even with you—kiss for kiss, ole dear!"

"You couldn't have swallowed all that. It was full!"

With sudden inspiration, he went back and searched the ground. He came upon the puddle, dipped his fingers into this and smelt it.

"What's your idea?"

"It was my share. I can do what I please with it!"

"As you please! I suppose I'm drunk in your opinion?"

"You've had ALMOST enough. In my opinion."

He held her very coldly as they danced. And she didn't try to win him—didn't try to blaze or taunt or even to equal him in an insolent audacity.

She was tired of it. So many times before she had been blithe or wicked or merry. And had won a temporary triumph.

Tonight her feet were heavy. She felt crushed and futile. You can't buck a game like this—one against the mob.

When he went to dance with Ora she thought in a wild bitterness: "Let her hurt him! I hope she does. I don't give a damn!"

An hour later she was winding through the trees on a bank

above the grove. Languorous August night—breathless except for the drift of perfume from that vast bed of stocks.

In the shadows couples were seated, murmurs of their whispers. And in the dance hall other couples moved languidly. She was used to all this—this open petting; this surfeit of caresses.

And she now very callously regarded a couple on the slope below her. Golden little Nellie Spears lost in the arms of Bert Rogers—not a spark of honest passion to it. You never saw Inga Brent who was fire-hearted and a gypsy do a thing like this. No one did.

She came to the lighted swimming pool. The band was playing here now. They were all dancing on the sands.

"I've been looking all over for you," said Hugh Hammond, swinging her into a waltz which he did delightfully but with an old-fashioned step. "Should you like to swim? Look, they are going in now."

As they moved to the rail, Jessie Reinach, a tall, spineless girl full of squeaks and squeals and willing at any embarrassing cost to win masculine attention, now came from the dance-hall swinging a brilliant Chinese shawl tightly about her.

Someone pulled the fringe.

"Careful dear," warned Jessie. "I've nothing but a G-string underneath."

"You've nothing inside or out, Jessie!"

Swish went the shawl. Jessie clung and squealed and giggled. In a moment two or three were after her, the shawl whisked this way and that.

"My Lord—they can't do that!" said Hammond greatly worried.

"Oh don't bother. Jessie always gets into some girly-girl tragedy like this. She adores it."

The shouting about Jessie was now excited, raucous, determined.

"But think how the girl will feel, Miss King, we can't allow this!"

The shawl was off. Jessie shrill and with little shakes of

her shoulders; pulled out the wide skirt of a very bouffant evening gown: "Smarties—aren't you smart."

"Throw her in the pool—pull off the glad rags!"

This time Jessie was really frightened.

Hugh Hammond turned white. "We can't jolly well stand here and see the girl hurt."

"Don't worry! Drunk as they are, they wouldn't be bothered. Seeing it's Jessie."

He gave her a horrified glance. She shrugged: "Oh what's the odds, as Ann Veronica says—flesh or flowers they're all alike to me."

But she was shaking—clinging to the rail with her eyes closed. Trust a damn little fool like Jessie Reinach to start this mess.

Shrieks from Jessie who was now sprawled on the sands, hugging vague chiffons about her. Rip—off came a scarf.

Hugh Hammond flew down the path: "Listen fellows," said he bursting into the group.

"Into the pool with him— Into the pool!"

He was pitched head first. In the excitement of this, Jessie was forgotten. She sat upright, bawling and hysterical and striking at anyone who offered assistance.

The group about the pool roared with laughter as Hugh impeded by his heavy shoes and his starched shirt swam to the opposite bank.

Jerry came out of a sickened daze to hear Inga: "We're going—we've had enough. . . . Where's Saxon? Go and get him—we're going back tonight— He's in the house with HER!"

CHAPTER XVII

Music mingled with the warm, perfumed languor of the night; drifted about shadowy figures winding through the trees. Now a laugh startled the silence, now a note of thrilling song.

Jerry, moving swiftly down the dim path from the pool, paused at a lofty redwood. She felt weak and leaned against it. The sounds were muffled here—all muffled, indistinguishable, sweet. The lanterns swaying in the trees had a blowy, wistful look. All so lovely.

She went on slowly, with an overpowering reluctance that increased with each step and was like an iron collar when she reached the house.

Mechanically she repeated Inga's words: "We're going home. Get Saxon. He's in the house. With HER!"

"Oh," she thought intently as though it were important, "more people have come." There were three more machines parked in the drive.

From the house came a loud wailing one-step. The dance floor was empty except for a single couple moving with tantalizing slowness in that far, unlighted alcove.

But the wide veranda adjoining this and built to command a sweep of hills and terraces and distant water, was now a scene of half drowsy excitement. On one sofa a young man slept, a listless hand trailing the floor. Near by, stretched on two chairs and now and then restlessly turning was a girl of eighteen. But these and two or three others in similar poses were no more noticed than the furniture.

The excitement centered about a group at the door. Three girls, three fellows. A fourth girl entering.

"What a hell of a place to spend the weekend," she mumbled

indistinctly. "I'm tired—wanta go to sleep. Can't find a bed in the house. Been everywhere."

She flung a long brown braid of hair over her shoulder and gave an uncertain tug to her shoulder strap. She was barefooted and in her nightgown and now slumped on a sofa between two of the youths who assisted her in adjusting and readjusting the shoulder strap.

"Oh, Lord!" thought Jerry bitterly and blinking, "where IS he? Where in the devil IS he?"

She paused at the landing on the second floor. There was a balcony here just above the veranda. It, too, overlooked the wide swinging valleys, the inspired march of distant hills.

Just above, gleaming in the pines, was the moon—a white, midnight moon.

They had watched a moon like this—that night long ago. And she knew then that she loved him—that she always would.

She pressed her face against the cool ivy climbing over the columns. She was afraid to look for him—afraid to find him.

Now Inga was calling—Inga running up the stairs.

"I don't know where he can be," said Jerry listlessly, meeting her. "I've been all over."

"Try a few doors!"

Inga gave a loud knock. Opened one, then another.

"Oh, don't!" Jerry pleaded.

Inga flung open the fourth. Ora and Saxon sitting on a divan. The room dim.

Suddenly it was lurid; it was reeling; Jerry in the center of it; in the center of destruction and havoc.

She saw him spring guiltily, angrily to his feet; heard his voice; heard her own; knew that she was stamping her foot, flinging hotly: "We're going home! Now!"

That he started to answer with the suave dignity liquor gave him: "Oh, are we? We came to spend the weekend if I remember correctly . . ."

Then his voice thickened; he lost the sequence and began to repeat.

This was terrible to her—appalling. She had never seen him drunk like this, before.

"Oh," said she, moving to him, taking his hand, "please come, Saxon. We're going because a dozen more people have arrived. There's not room for half of us . . . please . . ."

"You jush go if you like—jush go and see—jush do that."

They got him to follow down the stairs. The moment the cool night air struck in his face he was sobered. Sobered outwardly and hostile.

"No, sir, I'm not going home!" he insisted, belligerently. "Hell of a trick. What's the grand idea? You've stayed up nights before."

He turned abruptly: "That's that!" and joined a group at the table. He poured whiskey into a large coffee-cup—filled it to the brim.

Jerry dashed to him, snatched the cup.

"That's twice tonight," said he, raising the bottle to his lips. "Great little mama, aren't we?"

She turned abruptly, stung to the heart. Even drunk, the Saxon of three years ago would not have said this. Would never remotely have felt it. She went out and joined the group at the machine.

"You might as well go," said she. "He's not coming."

"You're not going to stick around and wait for him, are you?" inquired Inga with a flashing indignation. "What good can you do?"

"I don't know. None—I suppose. I feel like staying—I don't know why—"

The wind lifted the wavy top-knot and in the silver moonlight her eyes were soft blue flames. . . .

"I don't know—but I think I'll stay—" She stood forlornly gazing at the gravel, rubbing it with her foot.

She knew that she would stay because she wished to be near him. She could have wept because of the terrible maternal urge she now felt sweeping her to him—holding her here.

"Well," said John climbing out of the car, "come on Jer—we'll go back and get him." He took her arm in his sweet,

lovable way: "Don't worry, kid—he's really not drunk—not very drunk."

They wound back through the gardens to the house. Saxon was not at the table now. He was not dancing. They wandered to the swimming pool.

Then back up to that room. Not there.

They returned to the drive.

Suddenly Jerry pointed a thin brown finger. For a moment she couldn't speak. Then softly—almost inaudible: "Is that he—there?"

She grabbed John's hand, forcing him to run. She called gaily: "Saxon—Saxon!"

He and Ora had climbed to a machine. They were starting. Fifty yards distant. "Hurry, John—hurry!"

She called again.

The car leaped with a spurt. Jerry shut her eyes. She gave a vague high laugh. Now the car was flying down the road —vanished.

"I guess you better come with us."

"Yes," said she, smiling in John's face, "I guess I might as well."

CHAPTER XVIII

HALF past three that still August morning, Jerry stole into the empty living room. The moon shone through the window, lighting up whole shelves of books.

"How bright it is," she thought. "I never saw the moon so cold and bright."

Nothing sad about this, but it made her blink. She added forlornly: "I think I can read by this light."

And she tried to. Suddenly she shut her eyes, assaulted by the vision of a girl running down a dim path; a distracted figure sending out that gay call: "Saxon—oh Saxon—" The machine speeding away.

So now it was all ended. She knew that it was ended.

She sank in a chair and leaned her head against the cushions. She shivered with the cold. But she didn't care. It was comforting to shiver with the cold.

Out of her chill ache and tumult a phrase leaped. Her eyes burned with it and her thought. "Great little mama, aren't you? Taking care of me already?"

It was this phrase that did it; this phrase that now blightingly, ruthlessly awakened her.

She sank lower in the chair, making a gallant attempt to smoke. She didn't care that he was drunk. Nor even that he forsook her for Ora. Things like this—passing episodes, she could overlook.

All summer long she had been meeting them. Now with a wicked audacity; now with young, insolent gaiety. Oh, what of a kiss with golden Nellie Spear; what of a tropic moment with Tess? Or even what of an unpleasant rowdyism over Jessie Reinach? She—gay, captivating Jerry King could compete and triumph over them all.

And she had. Not as flagrant as this incident. But in kind, the same.

The realization that now shattered her thought was this: Saxon Rhodes no longer wanted the things she wanted. Her dream was not his dream.

He was not now the lover who had sat beside her one golden night in August just three years ago and murmured with rough, warm cheek pressed to hers: "Oh, Jerry, marriage shouldn't be such a failure. For us, it wouldn't. We're not tricked by any mere lure of the sense. I love you from your little brown hands to your wild sweet spirit. We could make a go of it!"

Murmuring this to her, picturing the two of them in a great studio room, joyously working out their bright, thrilling destinies. A two-fold blooming. Why not? "We can! Oh, Jerry, we will!"

And looking forward to this dear, supreme, enduring emotion. Believing in it.

Not this Saxon who cynically told her: "Great little mama, aren't you? Taking care of me already!"

Resenting her and brooking no interference. He was a free man yet! And glad to be free. Having his fling. Earning more; spending more. Drinking a little; flirting a little. Scornful of wives and marriage. Never losing the chance to make a quip about it.

It was this crystallization of his attitude that now beat her down . . . beat her into a still, frozen apathy. No use to go on. From one damaging episode to another till all the tender beauty was vanished. End it now!

She started walking about the room, her heart bounding madly. Give up this love that for three and a half years was the dream and passion of her life? So much so that only death would free her from it—ever.

She leaned weakly against the bookcases. She thought quietly: "I'll have nothing. Nothing." This shook her with an appalling desolation.

All her life she would have nothing—arid, empty years. She could scarcely breathe.

Then there came pelting over her the memory of their first months. Then the early days of his return, when her whole being melted to liquid fire at a look from him, at the clasp of his hand, the touch of his lips.

So much so that she longed often to lose herself in his arms; wished the world would vanish leaving her and Saxon alone, swept together immortally in the rapture of their love.

She had felt a secret scorn for the cowardice that was denying so supreme, so beautiful an emotion. A suicide of the spirit.

"Do whatever you are completely wanting to do. Know yourself—then be it to the thousandth degree, blazingly, daringly, every moment of your existence!"

Marza's way and the right way!

"Oh, why didn't I! Why didn't I!" she now thought darkly, frantically. "I wish I had!"

Fervid images made her heart flush. Oh, once when he held her, the light, thrilling eyes laughing into hers; held her and whispered: "You would have come across the seas to me? You meant that, Jerry?"

"I would fling all to the winds for you—all!" And she had added that thrilling, blasphemous line from Kipling: "I bear witness—I bear witness—there is no God, but YOU!"

She recalled this with a still panic.

"Why didn't I? I wasn't afraid—"

Scenes from the night flashed upon her; Nellie Spears hidden in the arms of Bert Rogers; that couple dancing with fearful slowness in the unlighted alcove; other couples merging in the shadows of the grove—They weren't afraid.

She hid her face in her arms. Not that—not that travesty of all that is sweet and fine and uplifting. Not that shoddy, ephemeral throb of the senses that any butcher's boy can feel.

No! All or nothing! A love high as mountains; enduring as the stars. This was her dream. This only she wanted. Not his hands and his lips. But the fidelity of the spirit—the communion of minds and thoughts and hearts. All and always.

This he had promised. And this was now lost.

But this was incredible and she murmured excitedly: "It's not lost. It can't be lost! Cling on—wait—hope!"

She was wandering about the room now. Suddenly she came to a violent stop: "If I don't make the break today, he will make it tomorrow. Inevitable as the sun coming, this is coming . . ."

* * * * * * *

All Sunday she kept waiting for the telephone: wondering what they were doing down there—sitting around the swimming pool and drinking gin fizzes to put them on their feet, perhaps.

He came Monday, a little after five without phoning.

He looked thin and pale.

Confronted by his hurt, half accusing eyes, she had a wish to fling her arms about him—to shove this cruel, shadowing world that was pushing so forbiddingly between them, aside.

She ran back to her room and stood there summoning her strength. She thought shaking: "Whatever he says will be right! Whatever he says now will be right. I can't do it—Oh, God, I can't!"

She sat on the bed and folded her arms against the thunder of her heart. She said choking: "I've got to—If I don't today—oh, sure as the sun—he will tomorrow!"

CHAPTER XIX

She went over to the mirror and adjusted her hat. Then rubbed a faint tinge of color to the creamy olive skin. She was terribly shaken and leaned on the bureau, daubing powder on her nose, twisting the hair into jetty curls about her face: "Why am I doing this?"

Ah—in the wild hope of holding him: drawing him back to the flame-sweet eyes whose soul and heart were his. Let him look in them and yearn for them!

She went with thumping, over-charged heart to the living room where he waited.

"Oh, we're going out," said he springing hastily to his feet, scarcely looking at Jerry.

"Yes. Marza will soon return." She stood hesitant, her head lowered, half expecting him to kiss her.

He didn't. The despair in her spirit grew.

"Let's go over to the park," said he in a quiet, casual tone.

"Oh no—not there."

A dark flush spread over his cheeks. "As bad as all that, is it?"

She shut her eyes, following him mutely. They walked down the steep Hyde street hills to the water.

"There's the Yale going out. Graceful, isn't it?"

She nodded, watching the rippling white trail the boat left on the waters.

"Why do you want to make a tragedy of it?" he asked abruptly.

She gave a faint smile. This was like him—putting her on the defensive. He always did when they disagreed. She lacked a sense of humor when she grew weary of incessant risque stories: she was a prude if she saw harm in a near-

amour with someone else's wife, or danger in a drunken youth driving an automobile.

Usually she won these verbal tiffs. For she could outboob him. Out-grin and out-ridicule him.

But now she looked across to the sun gleaming through mists on the Sausalito hills. And with each moment felt more crushed and more subdued.

This wasn't love sitting beside her in the golden autumn twilight: not love so busily seeking its own defense and wanting to put her in the wrong. It was love's antithesis—self.

And now in the brooding quiet a sense of fatality crept up and sat between them.

"Have you nothing to say?" he asked accusingly.

"Oh millions of words. But words won't alter facts."

"What facts! Unless you're jumping to conclusions because of Saturday night. I don't know why you're making an issue of the whole thing. After all it was pretty crude the way you all bolted after coming for the weekend. This time was no worse than others."

"John had an order to get through. He couldn't afford to stay up all night. There were no beds for all of us. We didn't leave because we weren't pleased. Phil was perfectly satisfied about it."

"You weren't helping John put through that order, were you? I got drunk for the space of half an hour. The first time you ever saw me drunk. So you run off and ditch me."

"No! I didn't run out on you. I came back and searched all over—ages. Then I saw you going through the garden. I ran after you. I called and called. But you got into the car. You drove off with her. I didn't know where. There seemed nothing for me to do. After all, you're a man and free."

"What do you mean by that?"

She said, white and quiet: "Not what you're thinking! I'm not telling you that I'm through because you chose to go off with Ora Pringle. I could forgive a physical infidelity."

"There's none to forgive."

"I wish there were and that it were all! For that's such a venial offense compared to other things. The thing that is deadly: that makes it impossible for two persons to go on is the infidelity of the spirit. And this is between us."

As the words came slowly into being—slowly and starkly, she was appalled to have uttered them.

He grew pale. He said ominously: "Did you discover all this on Saturday night? Because I sat next her at the table? Because I got an edge on and went for an hour's ride with her?"

He went on railing and accusing.

She thought, burning: "Why did I come? Oh, what a shame! How can he say these things so angrily!"

With a vague terror she perceived that she was waiting for him to soften; to put his arms about her—secretly, madly wanting this.

Waiting for him to deny the barriers between them; annihilate them with a tender: "Darling thing, how can you talk of parting—you and I? Oh, let's begin again!"

All her decision: all the truth her mind so clearly perceived would vanish. Nothing remain but him and her boundless need and worship. Her mind relinquished him. Her heart clung on and clung.

But he didn't soften. He said moodily: "Saturday afternoon you weren't feeling this way. Today you are. So of course it's on account of what happened. Do you realize what you've said, Jerry? That we can't go on! You can sit there perfectly calm and say this?"

She stooped over and dropped her lighted cigarette in the water. Perfectly calm with that wild blood beating agony on her brain—

"No—I'm not very calm—I'm not very thrilled. I'm not wanting this. It's here. I'm only seeing it."

She flung her head back astonished to find tears rushing to her eyes.

"Oh Jerry," said he in a burst of young fervor and looking into her misty blue gaze. "How can you say this? How can

you be so hard? Because you don't care any more? And once you loved me so . . ."

"I love you that much yet. If you really wanted me. You don't. It's not just this Saturday . . . It's all the arguments of all this summer. I've hated those house parties. You enjoy them. We seem to have quarreled incessantly. I guess we've just come to the parting."

Again she paused wondering how she could be wild enough to repeat this terrible sentence.

She went on weakly: "In your heart you don't believe in marriage. You don't want to marry, Saxon. And you're glad that we can't.

"So I think it would be better for us to call off all promises.

"But we can be friends—oh, we'll surely keep on being friends—"

Suddenly he was stooping to her, his palms pressing hers into the chill sands: "Do you think you mean this, Jerry? No, you don't! Tell me—do you believe what I said about Saturday—about her?"

He poured intent, burning eyes on hers. "Believe me?"

"Yes—about that. It's not important . . ."

"It is important."

"It only clouds the issue, Saxon. Whether Saturday happened or not, this break was coming. You've known it! Oh Saxon, you've resented me . . . You've taunted me for caring for you—

"You'll be happier free from me. You think you should deny this. But why?

"Why should we pretend? After all this summer—after all the disillusions why should we deny a fact? You don't care as you did. That's not your fault. You can't help it that you no longer love me . . ."

"Don't say it again!" He pulled her to him, half laughing but with a trail of moisture against her cheek. "I'm not perfect, Jerry. I've been to blame . . . I love you!"

She closed her eyes, her heart bounding—eager—credulous . . . her mind whispering—goodbye—we know it is goodbye.

He lingered at the door: "Darling thing—am I forgiven? Tomorrow the sun will shine—"

She went absently through the living room.

At the door of Marza's room she paused, about to call her. She noticed suddenly the drawers opened—an unusual disorder.

She went to shut this drawer. It was empty. Alarmed she pulled out other drawers. They were all empty.

She flew to the closet. Marza's clothes were gone.

Suddenly on the bureau she saw letters. One to her—one to Robert Caples. Marza was gone.

CHAPTER XX

A WARM, loaded moment, Jerry stood with Marza's letter in her hands. It was written in a distracted scrawl:

"Darling Pet, don't be alarmed. I've just received a wire from my sister. She's dying. I must leave. Oh, my pet, don't be too lonesome. Have Inga and Silvia stay with you. Please see that Robert gets this letter. He will return to town Saturday. Bring it to him, then, at once. It is very important. Now I have but five minutes more before I must catch the train. I want so to see you—bitterly. Good-bye, my pet, and all your mother's love."

On the bureau under the letter was their joint bankbook, the keys to the apartment and a few hasty instructions.

Twice Jerry read that letter, her thought parched. Suddenly she dashed to the phone and inquired what time trains left for Chicago.

"The last one left at six this evening—the next at 11 in the morning."

Six—Gone but an hour.

Finally she went to the phone and sent a telegram to her mother addressed to the Chicago-bound train.

"Wire the moment you receive this, no matter what time it is. Are you all right? I'm beside myself and want to follow you in the morning. Let me. Jerry."

At three came Marza's answer. "Darling pet, sorry to worry you. I'm all right. Sending complete details tomorrow. Don't follow until you hear further. Now go to bed, my pet, and pleasant dreams. Marza."

Weak with relief, Jerry lay in bed yielding herself to images of Saxon and echoes of the interview between them . . .

"Darling thing, am I forgiven? Tomorrow the sun will

shine. I'm not perfect and I've been to blame. But I love you!"

She put shaking hands over her eyes and whispered into the dark. "He does! I know he does."

Then abruptly, coldly she thought: "I was only making a bluff. I didn't mean to give him up. I can't!"

It seemed ridiculous that she had even considered it.

But after a while she felt his eyes filled with hostility: with accusation and resentment as he went back along the path and dipped his fingers in the little pool of liquor. Again when she snatched the cup of whiskey.

But she told herself weakly: "I gave him a chance. I told him he was free—told him to go! But he won't."

She kept repeating with exultance: "But he won't!"

"You can hold him, of course. Women always hang on. They hang on to be resented; to have their love regarded as a nuisance by the men they're fool enough to adore. You're not married to him, but already this is the keynote of his attitude. Beautiful, holy love! Something awfully high and gorgeous. He doesn't want you in his life. Blind yourself to it . . . the fact remains."

All Tuesday this hung over her in a heavy, depressing cloud. Yet all Tuesday she remained home waiting for him to phone.

She thought drearily: "I'll be one of those weak-kneed contemptible beings—one of those women without fire—without spirit . . . clinging on and on—"

But she called to him blithely when he phoned that night: "No. Don't come. I'm on a vacation and giving you one, ole dear. Try it out. Distance dims enchantment. So keep yours and see how it works. You're free as the good old air. Fly high. I may catch you on the fall—"

Wednesday and Thursday she kept to this programme.

Friday without phoning he drove out in Paul's roadster.

"Come on—come out of it!" said he, pulling her to the machine. "It takes two to make a marriage—and two to break it."

They parked in the remote quiet above the buffalo paddock

in the park. "Now tell me," said he, "why are you so depressed. It wasn't such a crime, was it?"

"No—it wasn't a crime. It only crystallized a situation that has existed for months. I didn't want to see it. Now I do."

"What do you see?"

"That we have no chance of happiness going on as we do. That we've come to the parting. Oh, don't interrupt. We're not married. But already you feel that I'm infringing on your freedom. My interest annoys you. You have this attitude already. What possible chance would we have for the kind of marriage we want, when you start in by resenting me? And how could I endure that—if I have any decent self-esteem?"

"I don't resent you."

"Yes. You lie in wait for the chance to taunt me about taking care of you and mothering you."

"In fun."

"Not always."

"You used to laugh at this and fight back."

"I could laugh yet. But you mean it. You're cynical of marriage and this sarcasm alone would convert me into the kind of hurt, cowering wife you couldn't endure. It would because I love you and you have power over me."

She sank low in the seat and watched that high tree making a great lament to the wind. It was dark and she could vaguely see his face.

Now he stooped and whispered: "Would you let me do that to you?"

"No—I don't want you to—but I feel defenseless. I am defenseless."

"Jerry," said he, and she knew that his face was white. . . . "I'll try not to. I don't want to. You try me again . . . won't you—please?"

It is always like this. But she was too young to know it. And deafened now by the great shouting joy that rose in her heart.

* * * * * * *

At home there was a message from Marza.

"Will you come, Jerry? I need you. Let Inga and Silvia have the apartment. Make the necessary arrangements. Please leave as soon as you possibly can. This is very urgent."

* * * * * * *

He rode across with her on the boat. She glanced at his strong, vital face that now turned to her with a sweetness and chuckle.

"Going to leave me? Not mad now, are you?"

"Oh," thought she with a flash and oppression, "what a frightful thing is this love a woman feels. We're slaves—slaves to the soul."

She closed her eyes, feeling his hand on hers. She thought with a sob: "Yes—just do that! And ask, are you mad!"

But she answered him brightly: "You're free, ole dear, while I'm gone. Be as free and as gay as you please. And you'll know by the contrast what you want. . . . I'm one who will have all or nothing. As I love you, I would be loved in return—utterly, madly—so or not at all."

"Jerry—I don't want to be free of you—I won't be free."

She gave him a pale, misty smile . . . a little rapt laugh. "You must prove it!"

When he kissed her she thought with panic: "There are no other lips in the world for me—none. . . ."

* * * * * * *

She was nervous—athrob with excitement when the train pulled in at Chicago. . . .

She looked about for her mother. Saw her. And stood rigid—frozen with alarm.

CHAPTER XXI

MARZA'S face cut white against the black, drooping hat—white, intense, lighted: a ghost-face limned in pain.

She saw Jerry. A smile flew over the pallor.

"Why, of course, I'm all right. Silly pet!"

"But so thin—oh, mother, so terribly thin and desperate-looking."

"Oh, come—nonsense!" said Marza, turning her face swiftly and signaling a taxi. "We'll have dinner and talk. How good you're here! You didn't mind, did you?"

They got into the taxi. Marza gave the address of the hotel.

"Oh, aren't you staying with her—your sister?"

"No. Not now. The danger is past. I'm SURE the danger is past."

"Did she nearly die?"

Marza sat with her eyes closed, still as marble. "Yes—they say so—before I arrived she went very near to death."

Then she began to talk rapidly of inconsequential things. What arrangements did Jerry make? Oh, Inga and Silvia were enchanted to take the apartment? They'll watch out for things? That's good. We may be here several months.

"Why shall we stay if she's better?"

"She needs me. I have business here."

* * * * * * *

Marza ordered dinner in their room and now she moved about with a still intensity, helping Jerry to unpack, talking with a tender, almost child-like eagerness.

"I've ordered everything you like. Even a bottle of sauterne. Here, put on this white thing. We'll stay in tonight and talk and talk. You won't mind that? A nice room, isn't it—"

Then as they sat to the table and Marza fingered the petals of a white rose: "Did you give my letter to Robert?"

"He hadn't returned by 5 o'clock Saturday, so I left it with Saxon to deliver."

"Oh," said Marza, raising the cover of a vegetable dish. She was seeing Robert Caples as he read her letter, and she now wondered how much in that moment of distraction she had told him.

"You were frightened when I left, Jerry? What was there in that message to frighten you? Just that my sister was dying—"

"Yes—I was frightened. What is the matter, mother? Your face is getting whiter if that can be. Look at your hands!"

"Oh, nonsense. I'm nervous—the strain—and glad you've come."

"Am I to see your sister? At last?"

"Yes—in the morning."

"Shall I have to sit with her a long time? I don't like sick old people. I've never understood your feeling—I can't see why you should care so. You wouldn't care this much if I were dying!"

"No—you've not understood. There are always things about another we don't understand. Even in a relation intimate as ours.

"Jerry, do you remember your father?"

"Yes—" said Jerry, startled by the abrupt transition. "He had bony hands. I remember his thin lips and the way he coughed. I hated to hear that. I remember the way he said to you: 'Must you even smile at the bellhops?'"

"Ah," said Marza. "It was a phrase of his. Were you fond of him? Do you remember loving him very much?"

"I didn't like him. I was afraid of him. He was so gloomy. I was happier a thousand times after he died. What makes you think of him tonight?"

"It's one of the things I want to talk about—your father. Do you remember Earl Brooks?"

"And the trip we might have had to Europe? I adored Earl Brooks—I think I do yet. I was 12 then and couldn't see why you wouldn't marry him."

"Of course, you don't remember Stephen Marsh?"

"And the bracelet with the silver bangles?"

"The man—not the bracelet. Do you recall Stephen? He came to visit us once. But you were very small."

"I was 9. We were in the rose garden house in Los Gatos, where my father used to sit under the trees and make you sit beside him and hold his hands."

"Yes—we were there when Stephen came for the visit."

Clear as though the picture were carved in living color, Jerry remembered that scene in the garden just outside her mother's window. Stephen Marsh, lordly, laughing fellow with his brown hair frosted at the temples. Stephen whispering hoarsely: "Oh, Marza, six years of this—damnable—damnable."

Marza's hand reaching up and closing Stephen's lips. He sweeping to her, kissing her. Marza returning to the sick man with her eyes lighted: her eyes like lights dancing.

"What do you remember of Stephen, Jerry?"

"That he was gay and handsome."

"Nothing else?"

"And that I asked you once after my father died: 'Will Stephen come again?' You said: 'No—he'll never come again!' and you ran into your room and closed the door."

Marza's eyes glowed like black, sunken stars in the pallor of her cheeks. Her hands, modeled like a statue's, lay inert on the table. Now through the parted lips went a sharp hurried breath.

But she said quietly: "He didn't come again. For he was dead. Stephen was killed in a railroad accident two days before your father died."

She got up quickly and went over to the bureau, standing there in the shadows.

"Oh, mother," said the girl running to her: "he died? Like that? And you loved him?"

"I loved him. From the moment I first saw him. I was twenty-one and married four years to a man I found it hard even to tolerate. We were in New York when we met Stephen. We were there one year when your father went away. He went to the Ural Mountains and was gone two years.

"I had those two years . . . completely. Stephen and I had those two years. Then your father returned."

She steadied herself on the bureau.

Jerry looked into her mother's blanched, drawn face. "Oh, mother—must you tell this now? Why do you torment yourself?"

"I wish to tell this. I have brought you here to listen. It is necessary. I am not tormented. I had the two years and am glad . . . riotously—boundlessly glad. I've always been.

"Then your father returned. He was jealous of all men. But of Stephen violently. We came back to San Francisco."

Now Marza went over and sat on the stiff chair near the table.

"We came back to San Francisco, Jerry. But I left a priceless gift here behind me. . . . I had to—it seemed that I had to. I left my child and Stephen's here behind me. . . . He watched out for her—she was three years old. Your father never knew. . . ."

"And now—mother now—"

Marza took a picture from a book on the table. "Look at her. You will see her tomorrow—your sister, Jerry—who is dying and who needs us. . . ."

CHAPTER XXII

"Your sister, who is dying, Jerry, and who needs us—"

With shaking hands, all the chords of her being touched and vibrating, Jerry took the picture.

The face of a girl with gallant, winsome look—a very young girl with laughing eyes and an eagerness in the strong, sweet mouth. A wondrous pretty face, it seemed to Jerry, who now gazed at it through misty, troubled eyes.

"Oh, mother," said she, choking, "why did you keep her away? Why did you never tell?"

"Would that I had! This might not have happened. This would never have happened. I am punished. I deserve to be punished. She may be taken from me. They will not say the danger is past. And if she lives—if she lives, she may not walk again. She fell from a horse and has broken her back."

"Oh, mother!"

Marza closed her eyes, sitting there blanched and stony. "I have betrayed my trust—frightfully betrayed it. At first I was forced to it. I had to hide her. As the years went, there seemed no opportune time . . . no way—I was a coward—

"Now," she raised a heavy, inert hand and struck it across her forehead. "Now, this comes of it! This comes to her through me!"

She put up her hands, motioning away the solace Jerry would have offered. "There is none," she murmured. "No excuse—no rationalizing it. Listen—"

Through the strained, intense hush went Marza's voice in the low, husky music of pain. Vivid pictures flashed.

Marza in love with Stephen, radiantly young, bidding George King good-bye. The two years' absence—the two

supreme, happy years. And the little girl Stephanie born to them. Eight months they had her. One night, one desperate agonized night, the word of George King's return. Stephen and Marza taking their child, their adored pretty little thing, away from the secret home they had shared, giving it to the care of a nurse. Bidding each other that heart-broken farewell.

"You remembered her, Jerry. You remembered your little sister. And frightened me with your talk. You used to ask where the baby went. Oh, how terrified I was. I used to hold you in my arms and tell you never, never to talk of her. One day you came in from a walk. You ran up and whispered: 'I saw our baby. I saw her in the park. And someone else has got her. Another lady.' You were shaking with excitement and wanted me to go out and find her. You cried when I said it wasn't ours. You were very dear.

"I never left you alone a moment with your father. He was busy and ill and fortunately you bothered him. They were terrible years—those three years we remained in New York after your father's return. . . ."

Harried, jealous years that held snatched, flaming joy in the daily visits to the little girl and in the wild, stolen moments with Stephen.

"I used to wait till he left in the morning. Then I would fling on my coat and rush out to see her. Oh, how quickly those mornings flew. She was running about and talking. She would cling to me and say: 'Don't go, Marzie—don't go!' And I would come home with heart breaking.

"Then your father became sicker. Sometimes for a week he wouldn't leave the house. I had to sit with him. He was suspicious if I opened the door—if I went to the corner to mail a letter. Those days would pass and I would almost be crazy with longing. But I could see neither of them.

"One noontime he followed me. It was the first time in two months we had dared to meet. He saw Stephen; saw him come up in the gallant way he had and take my hands.

"Five minutes later I was in a taxi with your father. We

drove home. He began to pack our trunks. I pleaded. I promised. Anything for a day's delay. He went on packing.

"I begged him to free me. I threatened to run away. But he would have taken you. The state would have given you to him. He reminded me of this. He told me I could go. He said: 'I will keep the child.'

"So I went with him. That night we were on the train to San Francisco. I left without seeing her—without the chance of a last hour with her—without a word for her care—Two years passed—"

For two years Marza didn't see her child. Stephen cared for it. That summer before his death he was transferred to Chicago.

Then Marza went wild with anxiety. A little thing only five years old deserted—left alone—traitorously alone.

So Stephen had the child brought to Chicago. It was put in a convent there. And he came on to the rose-garden house in Los Gatos, brooking George King's hostility, just to tell Marza of this; just to make her sure that he would not forsake the little one.

Marza pressed harsh fingers against her temples: "Fourteen years ago—that was fourteen years ago—"

"Does she know? Anything—of this?"

"That I am her mother. She knows this. She has always known this. And that her father is dead. She has the silver bracelet yet, like the one he brought you. She remembers sitting in his lap and that he taught her to count the bangles. And that she used to wait for him on Sundays. On Sundays he took her out. She's often told me that he took her to the park where they went on a merry-go-round. And then that they went rowing on the lake. She thinks I was ill all those years. And that's why she was put in school. It is so easy to deceive a child. They have such trust in us. She thinks her name is King. She is known as Stephanie King."

"Then she doesn't know you have me?"

"I've told her of a cousin. For years she's heard of her cousin. You—Jerry. She knows that you're coming—"

"A cousin?" Jerry repeated, feeling suddenly crushed and disowned. "We will tell her the truth now? When she is able —oh surely! Oh, mother, after my father died—you could have brought her then!"

Marza's hands moved over till they covered her eyes: "I should have brought her then. How could I explain her—a child past five, unless I denied being her mother? I couldn't disown either of you. Nor could I tell the truth. Oh God—how many nights I lay awake. How many years I planned. Two years ago I thought we might go to Europe. You remember I had hopes of this. But there wasn't enough money. And she wanted to finish school."

Marza rose and came swaying to Jerry. She said quietly: "The wrong I've done her is greater than the wrong I do you —now. How do you take it, Jerry? We are nearer in thought. I should like to know how you take it."

"A sister—a sister," thought Jerry, this seeming so unreal, so incredible that she now only put her arms about Marza, saying in a high, trembling falsetto: "Don't be a fool, Marza —don't be altogether a fool. What do you mean, how do I take it? How do you suppose I'd take it? You're gorgeous to me and brave and I love you now a thousand times more. Marza darling, I'm glad you had courage enough—joy enough. Is she worthy of you? Oh Marza—what is she like—what is she like!"

She hid her face with a soft, hysterical laugh against Marza's soft, sweet neck. "What shall we do with her—Marza, what can we do with her—"

"I want to take her home . . . want you to help me take her home—"

CHAPTER XXIII

JERRY paused with her hand on the door. She felt warm with the crowded hush of a vast excitement.

"I'll go alone," she told Marza. Now she wondered why she said this.

Behind this door her sister lay. She pushed it breathlessly. And stood backed to it, staring at the quiet figure on the bed.

She saw the profile clearly. The short upper lip of a full, sweet mouth: the short, straight nose, brown, silky brows. And fallen carelessly across the forehead, a lock of hair, the rich shade of old mahogany.

"Oh," thought Jerry, brushing a swift, fierce little hand across her eyes. "All right so far."

She stepped lightly to the bed and gazed, blinking in the sleeper's face. Tender and child-like it seemed with those brown silky brows and parted lips. The eye-lashes gave a kind of merry look, for they were short but amazingly thick like a stubble about the waxy lids. Even closed, the eyes were provocative. The mouth bore traces of pain, but it had a gallant, winsome look.

"Like he was," thought Jerry. "Like Stephen. Oh—one of us!"

She closed her eyes with a strange, bitter longing to sob: to kneel at the bed and kiss these sweet, parted lips.

"My sister," she went on vaguely—"really my sister."

And she wondered, with a sinking, what this girl would say —if she would like this. . . .

It would be hard for her. She would bear the brunt of it. Of the three Stephanie would have to fight the hardest.

This suddenly brought tears to Jerry's eyes that were now surprised by a faint: "Hello! I see them. Been peeking.

You're just as I dreamed you. And me? What do you think of me?"

The short upper lip quirked. Jerry found a pair of hazel eyes that even now seemed laughing, opening to hers: "Like me?"

"You're all right. As much as I see."

"I like that! Would you mind kissing me?"

Jerry stooped down, her heart in her throat. Her sister—

Stephanie smiled—lying there so quiet. She was very worn and white. Now the short, stubby lashes went up and down.

"I've waited years for you, Jerry. Were you always curious about me, too?"

"Yes."

"You came all this way to see me. I'm so glad. It makes it easier for mother. You're very dear to her—" Jerry stooped down and folded her hands over Stephanie's. She had a hot, tight feeling in her throat—a feeling of blood flying wildly to her cheeks. This husky-voiced stranger—her sister—so calmly calling Marza "mother." So quiet that—"you're very dear to her—"

She regarded Stephanie's hand—thin, modeled like a statue's—Marza's hands.

Marza gliding into the room, face transfigured—a radiant look. She folded her arms gently over Stephanie. "You're better! My darling better!"

Stephanie said: "Mother, dear!" And again Jerry experienced the shock—the peculiar tightening of her throat.

She was glad to get out in the air; glad to be walking swiftly from the hospital to the hotel. But in the room she became restless and went out to wander through the shops.

She came to abrupt halts with that terrible wish to sob: to fling herself against the wall and sob. "How can we work it out? Who can work this out?"

It kept her awake that night—many nights.

Especially when she sat with Stephanie and repeated with ever-fresh incredulity: "My sister!"

Then as she found herself drawn more and more poignantly

with a tenderness—with a deep thrilled liking for this gallant, winsome daughter of Stephen and her mother . . . then she thought with a bursting pang: "How can anyone tell her the truth—now after all these years?"

She wondered incessantly how Stephanie would bear it—how much courage she had.

Stephanie, growing a little stronger, was puzzled by these lapses.

One day she interrupted Jerry's reading with a gleeful: "You darby! You've not accepted me—not yet, have you? That's why you sit there regarding me with such brooding eyes. You're like Marza—arrogant, extra-fine. But I'm a common carrot-kind of person, friendly even to a horse when I like him."

She held her hands in front of her as though she were counting the fingers, making sure there were ten. "Jerry, does my mother mean to take me home? She's promised this so long. Each year. Then always something happened. But this time it was to be certain. And here I am. Will this be an excuse, do you think?

"But I'm not going to be laid up always! I'm just NOT that kind of person. In a few months I can be moved. Will she take me with her?"

"Oh—I'm sure—I'm sure she will."

"I've an odd idea, Jerry, that you're mixed up in it. Why do I feel this about you? Why should you be involved?"

"Am I the dark lady of the sonnets to you, Stephanie?"

"There's some reason. I don't know—" She drew the hands closer till they rested lightly over her eyes. This gesture was exactly like one of Marza's. "I dread being disappointed—this time."

"This time you won't be disappointed. She means to take you. That's why I came—to help."

She turned her eyes slowly and gave Jerry a long, searching look. Then laughed: "And you will!"

"I will!"

* * * * * * *

Marza moved about the room smiling. She came to meet Jerry with a laugh—with that high, golden laugh. As though there were no problems in the world.

"She will be better. She may even walk—soon in a year or less. Oh, my pet! Like a benediction—like a forgiveness."

"You mean to take her home, Mother? Back to San Francisco?"

Marza had her back turned now, her hand turning the pages of a book. "It is one of the plans—perhaps the wisest."

"If we go home you can't claim her as a daughter. It would be foolish from your standpoint and unnecessary. And it would make Stephanie's lot needlessly bitter."

Marza's hand pausing. "We could all go to some strange city. I've thought of this. The three of us—"

"We haven't money enough. You'd have to sell the apartment. You'd have to give up everything. It would be awfully destitute—making new friends—cutting loose from everything. . . ."

She broke off because she felt weak. She went over and smoothed powder on her nose. Cut loose from everything—

Go to some strange new city and begin again.

But for her there could be no new beginning. Her heart was anchored in the past—in him.

And in her pocket was a letter from Inga—a withering, desolate letter.

She longed to be home—fly home. If they stayed here much longer it would be too late. And everything would be ended . . . utterly.

CHAPTER XXIV

She was bewildered by this sudden, intense criss-crossing of other lives on her life. Stephanie's—her mother's—

Go away to some strange new city and all begin again! Go way—give him up utterly!

She took a hot, weighted breath and walked more rapidly. Late afternoon, the end of September. Trees along the lake all red and brown. Leaves falling. Autumn and melancholy.

"Go away? What if I did? Lost anyway. It's all lost anyway."

She closed her fingers over Inga's letter and gazed resolutely at a boat resisting the wind.

He was free of her. Had taken his freedom.

Inga told of a house-party at Pebble Beach. The Hopkins had opened their new place; the place Saxon built.

"It's perfectly stunning. You saw the plans. But you've no idea how magnificently it sets in with the trees and the hills. They're just wild about it and are lauding Saxon to the skies. You can't blame the lad if he gets his head slightly turned. Anyway, he's going big with the filthy rich, so his future is made.

"The Pennings are to have him build an English manor-house. Hereby hangs romance. Perhaps he's told you—that is, if you're letting him write. I think, ole dear, that he's missing you most awfully. He came up for dinner the other night. Sylvia and John cooked it. So Saxon and I had to wash the dishes as Sylvia won't let them lie in the sink. She's afraid of ants. She wakes up each morning to see the sun painting Diablo. This is a marvelous crow's nest you and Marza have found for yourselves.

"We've got our lamps on the attic apartment and are making

it unpleasant for the Turners so they'll move out and we'll move in. We've figured it out and can pay the rent. So you and Marza shall have us cavorting above you. Sylvia says she can paint a masterpiece from that look-out.

"But to get back to Saxon. He talked and talked of you. Asked me if I thought you went away to get rid of him. So I think he's still yours though he's having a dizzy time with the women.

"That's the way with these hard-working, virtuous young males who don't have a chance to sow wild oats when they should. Twenty-six to thirty is the dangerous age for them. Lord, how these belated adolescents DO step!

"And the gay, hectic time he's having. This harks me back to the Pennings and the daughter of the family. Mary Eunice Pennings Bothwell. I don't think you know her. Rather striking with a sylph-like figure and eyes somewhat like yours. Plenty of conceit which as you know passes as S. A. with the dumb male.

"Mary Eunice gets her final divorce and her maiden name by the end of the week. Believe me she'll give Ora Pringle a run for her money, judging by the hotsy-totsy evidence at the house-party. She and Saxon danced every number together. And the way she intrigued him! There ought to be a law against this unjust competition of gay divorcees. If chastity is to remain on the face of the earth, though I've always had my doubts about its worth! Certainly it ain't the weapon that wins the wedding-ring today!

"Mary Eunice is conferring with him daily about plans for the manor house and no one knows what else! They were at Tait's Saturday. I saw one long sweet one that he gave her or she gave him. Anyway he seems highly pleased with himself—a little surprised and very exultant with his triumphs."

Jerry watched the little boat resisting the wind. She felt like that—buffeted.

He was taking her at her word. "Ah—be as free and as gay as you please while I'm gone! You have the world's room. Take it!"

What treacherous cruelty had led her to the saying of it? She was mad—utterly mad. She should have held on. Ora Pringle would, Mary Pennings would!

She should go back. Fly back—

What good? What good? There crept into her thought, making it utterly bleak, the consciousness of futility: of her utter, abject defenselessness.

She could not hold him. The pull against her was too strong. All summer she had felt it.

Hold on? Yes—for more quarrels, more surface reconciliations. Better this way—better ended—

The desolate thing was that she could not accept it: Could not kill the young, surging hope. Hide it—yes. But she had gone away loving him—and she would go on loving him and waiting for a return of his ardor. Waiting for the miracle. Inwardly, infallibly certain that it must happen. She would not lose this love. She could not!

In the middle of October she received a letter from him that deepened, if possible, her wound.

There was this paragraph: "Things are breaking wonderfully for me. I've several big jobs under way and several more in sight. Jerry, I wonder, a great deal, what motives you had in insisting on our parting. Were you growing uncertain of your feeling? You deny this. But I wonder. We were both pretty young when we first met and neither of us had ever cared for anyone else. I've an idea that you figured we'd both be better off if we took a fling at others before entering the dubious state of matrimony. I'm beginning to think you were awfully wise."

Wise! Fling her heart to desolation and him to Ora Pringle or Mary Eunice Pennings!

It wouldn't do any good to go home now . . . no good.

Yet the more she recognized this the more impatient and restless she became. Until now she was burning with it. Almost sick with despair.

If she could but see him for one hour! She thought this sometimes as she dressed. As she looked at her image in the

mirror. Then her cheeks would turn crimson and her eyes flame. If she could have just one hour, she would win him again!

The prospect then of going to some new place—of cutting ruthlessly free became insane—unthinkable. The confession to herself that she had lost.

She would sometimes vision this new, destitute life she and Marza and Marza's Stephanie would have. Quite poor—friendless—menial. No bright, singing contacts—no flash and color.

Subdued—chill—loveless. She would repeat this last word until her heart blazed. Loveless—a defrauded woman growing thin and righteous with the years.

"No! Not that! I'll never drift to that!"

At twenty-three no one thinks so.

Marza was aware of her storm. One night she sat a long while pretending to read.

Suddenly: "Stephanie can be moved in four weeks. The doctor told me today."

"Where can she be moved?"

"Wherever we are to live."

"Where is that to be? Mother!"

Marza flicked ashes from her cigarette: "Where do you want it to be, Jerry?"

"Why put it up to me?" Then hushed—reluctant—"You've not told her yet? She will have a right to say."

Marza turned the pages of her book. "I can't undo the wrong to Stephanie now. But I can make her way easy. Perhaps I would best do this by taking her and you to a new place. But this would uproot your life."

"Yes," thought Jerry stilly, "and yours too!"

"But that is the only way," Marza went on in a subdued, half-pleading way, "that I can acknowledge you both. It will be terrible to Stephanie to be denied. I know this!"

"She has one compensation."

"What compensation?"

"The memories she has of her father and the knowledge

that you loved so greatly. There would be this beauty—this inner conviction that she is really better born than I—far better born than I. And that in your heart, Marza, you must look back with more joy to her coming than you did to mine."

"Ah no! When the choice was forced I couldn't forsake you even for the two of them. And I loved Stephanie as God alone can measure it. But you, Jerry, came to me in a loneliness—an answer to a pitiable need. I never counted that you belonged to your father but to me alone. All the while you were coming I poured out the love of lives on you. We were two against a bitter, loveless world. You are woven of my soul."

"But she is woven of your great love! . . ."

"Will that compensate a girl nineteen—just nineteen?"

* * * * * * *

They took Stephanie to a little resort on the lake.

"We'll stay a while . . . wait till she's stronger."

"Do it today," Jerry finally pleaded. "Marza, tell her today!"

"Yes—today. I will."

She went up and kissed her mother's pale lips and she murmured, feeling that her whole life rested in Stephanie's hands: "Mother, tell it as you told me—like that. What can she do but glorify you? At nineteen can she help but thrill to a tale like that? If she's worth anything—anything at all. . . ."

CHAPTER XXV

JERRY stooped and filled her hands with brown dry leaves. Then she turned so that the wind from the lake blew her hair this way and that.

She thought of Marza and her sister in there talking: Stephanie learning the reason for her life-long exile.

Would she feel greatly wronged? And would the new life they were planning for the three of them become bitter and difficult?

* * * * * * *

The glow from the fire fell on Stephanie's face, making it very delicate against the dusky warmth of her hair.

She heard Jerry's step and reached out a hand. "Oh, yours are cold. Sit down, won't you? Right there." For a long moment she didn't open her eyes, though the gallant, winsome mouth seemed smiling.

Presently she turned her head: "You remember him, don't you, Jerry? My father—I do, too. I remember gay things of him. He was all right, wasn't he?"

She turned full eyes to Jerry and gave a soft, catchy laugh: "Now, we know what's what. Makes it so much clearer going on, doesn't it?"

It went straight to Jerry's heart—the brave soundness of her. It made her tremble with a deep, warm admiration. Stephanie was worthy of Marza's great love; was a fine, gallant person.

She felt a sudden pride in Stephanie; a sudden boundless relief. It would be easy to go on with her—easy and joyous.

This feeling grew. She would regard the slim figure stretched before the fire and think with a quickened throb:

"She's a little peach. I'm glad she's pretty." Or if she noticed a twinge of pain along Stephanie's lips: "She's suffering—she pretends not to."

At these moments she had an almost maternal feeling, sharing poignantly in Marza's anxiety; understanding Marza's heart-breaking tenderness, her wish to make things up to Stephanie.

Sometimes when she came in from long, lonely walks and dropped before the fire to listen to Marza's reading, she would think happily: "How cozy this is! How much finer Marza seems. Marza was a better person than she turned into."

One day in the beginning of December she and Stephanie were alone. Said Stephanie abruptly: "It would be sheer madness to go off to some new city. To say nothing of your part of it. Well, I shan't so much mind being passed off as the cousin. You know, Jerry, I'm just dying to see that place where you and Marza have lived. I've read so much about the Golden Gate and the great bay. What a thrill to sit up in bed in the morning and just look out and see the boats coming almost up to the door.

"Jerry, I wonder why all that should be considered tragic—I mean that about Marza and my father. The end was . . . think of it—the irony that he should have been killed like that. But for the rest, it seems to me only thrilling and sad. I loved him. Maybe I don't remember very much—maybe I've made a great deal of it up and idealized him and think that I can clearly recall his image. It may be just the pictures that I've looked at so much.

"But I'm proud of him. I'd like to call myself Stephanie Marsh. I suppose that would be a fool defiance. There's no need to take the world into a person's confidence, is there?

"Well—don't you think we ought to be going home soon—in time for Christmas? I don't care how you smuggle me into the family. As long as I'm sure you and Marza will like having me about. You don't resent me, do you, Jerry?"

Jerry, kneeling before the fire and adding an absurd number of logs to the flames: "Oh, by the way, I love that rag-tail

bob of yours. I've not seen one like it before. I'm glad you've got chic, Steve!

"But think what a cross you might have been. Suppose you'd been a lily-sister or a psalm-singer and got mawkish about it? Or conventional and developed an inferiority complex? I was terribly afraid of this. You never can tell how a person's going to react."

"You forget, Jerry, how lonely I've been. Year after year in a convent. Nothing hilarious except those brief yearly visits of Marza's.

"And I did my share of wondering. The last two years especially. Before that I was content at school. Marza kept saying that when I finished we'd go to Europe. We didn't.

"Then last year I was wild to go to California. I had my heart set on X-ray work. But I could just as well have been placed in a laboratory in San Francisco as here. Marza hadn't much answer to that. But when Sister Rose got me the opening here, Marza just wrote: 'Take it. I think it better.'

"I was fearfully crushed then. It seemed odd that she shouldn't want me because I knew she loved me.

"Jerry—I'd be earning $150 now if this accident hadn't happened.

"That's another thing—how are we fixed for money? Marza says we're rich, but I know we're not—are we? Besides, the money came from your father, didn't it?"

Jerry burst out laughing: "Well—if you're going to get fussy, yes—such as we have did, I believe, come as an unintentional bequest from one late but unlamented George King. He had a tight face.

"We're rich as long as we have three meals a day and sufficient garments to cover us. We have that."

"But I've cost a fearful lot. Four months in the hospital. And the doctors and nurses. I found out and it amounts to about $2500. Then there are all the hotel bills.

"Can Marza make the grade?"

"Marza can always make a grade, Stephanie. I've found that out about her."

To herself, Jerry thought with terror: "2500! Ye Gods!"

But Marza gave a serene, irresponsible answer to her fears: "We have plenty. I took out a mortgage of $5000 on the apartments. That will cover all the bills here."

"But the living when we go home?"

"In the Spring, we'll have to take another mortgage—the place can stand it."

"You have to pay interest on mortgages, Marza."

"I'm aware of this—"

But not sufficiently aware of it to disturb her. She was sitting before a mirror now and combing the rich black hair away from her smooth, beautiful forehead. She glanced from her image to Jerry and said with a deep, trembling laugh. "Not long ago, Jerry, a wrinkle seemed important to me. Now I'd be content to wear mittens like an old lady."

"Have a heart, Marza—don't get religious!"

"I've always been religious, Jerry. People who feel deeply are."

Jerry in her corner figured resolutely. They would have less than $200 a month clear—perhaps considerably less than this . . . then with another mortgage?

"It's up to me"—she thought—quietly. "I better get on the boat!"

That night Jerry wrote to Mac Phail, the teacher at the art school who was interested in her work and had advised her to try illustrating.

"I've got to get a job—a real, paying job with a regular paying salary. If that place with Erskine is still open will you speak for me—"

She paused with a peculiar feeling of guilt. Six weeks ago Erskine, interior decorator, wanted an assistant . . . a girl with artistic training. Jerry had refused. What a come-down for a brilliant genius person such as she!

She now thought hotly: "I've never made any kind of decent effort." She grew crimson with her memories. Stalling around waiting for Saxon Rhodes. Willing—slavishly willing and eager to lose her identity in his. Openly she had denied

this—had talked largely of her own future and of a two-fold blooming.

She knew in her heart that Saxon and her love of him had sufficed—the only future she wanted.

Now—he had cast her off—oh yes—it amounted to this. . . .

"And a good thing," she thought, pressing her fingers till the knuckles showed white. . . . "Now I'll get out on my own. . . ."

* * * * * * *

MacPhail answered in a wire: "If you can get here by the first of the year, Erskine will hold the place."

Just before Christmas they started home. All the way Jerry thought excitedly as though the future would be settled in this one incident: "Will he meet me? Will he be there to meet me? I'll know by that—"

CHAPTER XXVI

STEPHANIE, perched on the sofa in the little stateroom, pulled a snug hat over her dark, ruddy hair. Her hands trembled excitedly. "Almost in, aren't we? I suppose there'll be a vast crowd to meet us."

"Oh, you do, do you? The mayor and the Board of Supervisors and a Hawaiian band to hang leis about our necks?"

Stephanie's short upper lip quirked merrily: "Why not? With all that retinue of yours? They'll be there, won't they, Jerry—all your men? What do men say when they write pages and pages like that?"

"Like what?"

"Oh, those fat letters in the long, spidery scrawl. You got one every day. Were those from Heinie? And the one that looked printed came from Saxon? At least those two will be there, won't they?"

"No. They don't know when we're arriving. No one will be there."

Jerry turned, her heart knocking hotly, and gave a last, hasty survey to her face. It was pale—with an intense burning pallor. "Why do I expect him?" she thought nervously. "When I didn't even tell him the train? That's all right! He knows we're coming. He could find out from Sylvia—"

Stephanie gave a large, absent sigh: "Then I'll have to wait, I suppose. I'm dying to see you in action, Jerry. I'm going to copy all your tricks and make myself frightfully fascinating. Do you know I've never received an amatory epistle in my life? And I'm dying to!"

Jerry glanced into Stephanie's flushed, glowing eyes and thought with a pang: "Waiting for love! Stephanie too. De-

fenseless before it like all the fool women in the world. He won't come—of course!"

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She stacked the suitcases. "You wait, Stephanie. I'll get the red caps. We're in."

A knocking. A man's voice.

Jerry's heart bounded. But the next instant her arms were about Robert Caples and she was saying with a little sob: "Oh it's you—only you, you homely old love with your long dill pickle nose in the self-same spot. You're just in time."

"To carry me!" interrupted Stephanie with her gallant and friendly naivete. "How do you do, Robert? I knew there'd be a borrowed lover to carry me about till I've time to acquire several of my own. It's awfully nice in you."

Robert laughed and lifted the elfin Stephanie with a great gentleness.

There passed between him and Marza a long, deep look of understanding. Marza's eyes lighted. Robert's humble and eager as a boy's—always when he looked at Marza.

"She's told him," thought Jerry. "As if that would matter to a love like his!"

She went out before him. But she wouldn't look around—pretending even to herself that she wasn't seeking him—nor even remotely expecting him. She walked nervously—uninterrupted to the boat.

She sat on the edge of Stephanie's wheel chair and blinked because of the glare on the water.

* * * * * * *

The whole house was filled with flowers. Inga and Sylvia had dinner ready.

Stephanie, wild with excitement and delight kept ordering: "Push me over there—the view—now to the kitchen. Oh, stop for a chat with Inga—I know you, with the Kewpie face and the red hair. . . .

"Oh, and you're Sylvia with your eyebrows coming together and awfully good—the last surviving good girl. I know everything."

In a loud aside to Jerry: "Read the notes, why don't you! Who in heaven sent all the flowers? Your men? Which from Saxon? Oh, quick—how can you be so stolid about it? Does this happen often in the wild and wooly West? What a thrill. Roses and gardenias in December! They must be vastly rich!"

The gardenias were from Heinie. Chrysanthemums from Bud Malone. Crimson roses from Hugh Hammond, the Englishman whom Jerry greatly liked—he who had protested so indignantly against the tubbing of Jessie Reinach. Even Basil North sent flowers—a great basket of asters and heather.

None from Saxon.

Jerry made a pretense of searching for catsup. She stood in the pantry and thought furiously: "I should care! I'll be damned if I care!"

She went upstairs with Inga. They had taken the top apartment—one immense room with a bath and kitchenette and a porch fixed up as a workroom.

"Sylvia got the prize at the last exhibit—just heard the beginning of the week. She's landed an order to do a portrait of Mary Eunice Pennings on the strength of it. Saxon swung it. He seems to have the dame hypnotized, and she's coming here to sit for it. You'll have a chance to appraise your successor?"

"Is she really my successor, Inga? Is it quite serious?"

"On her side—yes. He was best man at Phil's wedding. You didn't know that, did you. A surprise to every one. Mary Eunice, the sweet young virgin, only divorced once, was maid of honor. It was a magnificent party. Even Sylvia got on edge so you can feature the rest of us.

"Mary Eunice wept on my shoulder. She gets sentimental in her cups. She asked me to inquire of Saxon the state of his feelings.

"With a world full of Ora Pringles and Mary Pennings, she fancies that a man still thinks of marriage!

"Odd, isn't it, the way women do? Even the ones who are making it unnecessary."

"Well—he's safe for two weeks or more till he finishes this job in Los Angeles."

"Is he in Los Angeles now?"

"Yes—just went down to look over the site for a million-dollar theater Paul is to build. He does more work there than here. Saxon is handing this job—or will when they get it."

Jerry walked about the porch picking up unfinished sketches. This helped a little. He wasn't here when the letter telling of her home-coming arrived.

Saturday came a special delivery letter: "Awfully sorry I missed that letter, Jerry dear. I could have sent a wire, anyway. Hope you didn't think harsh things to make my score even lower than I know it is.

"I've missed you much more than you think. Have you come home changed at all, I wonder? I was surprised and sorry to hear that you've taken that job. It's not what you want, is it?

"But perhaps you can make something big out of it and you may have time to keep on with your other sketching.

"I'm very eager to see the little cousin. If she's as good as you say, there's a treat in store for some one. I hope they'll have sense enough to appreciate it before it's too late.

"Jerry—perhaps I can swing you some good jobs. The Pennings will be wanting some one to do their furnishing. They haven't an idea and if you told them to paint the windows green and pink—they'd do it. I can get you this job. You'll let me help when I can—won't you?"

She read again and again—eyes blinking. It might mean everything—that letter. It might mean nothing.

"I'm fool enough to pin hope on a phrase—a vague phrase—"

Christmas she waited and waited. Last year he had given her a boudoir clock—an artistic gem. He was poor and had gone all over the city searching a thing of beauty for the money he could spend.

"Two years more—it won't take long to tick that time off, darling thing, will it? . . ."

He said this, loving her with those light thrilling eyes.

Now, standing at the window she was aware of Marza watching—Marza guessing.

So she wouldn't stir when the bell rang.

A great pot of poinsettias. She unfastened them quietly. She found herself counting the blossoms—eight—nine—ten—Oh flowers—this is the way a man says good-bye—flowers for Christmas.

CHAPTER XXVII

JERRY wound her arms about her hunched knees and shivered. Chilly at 7 o'clock these mornings. Fine to be the man of the family, but breakfast in bed when the sun comes up is nicer.

She gazed over to the bed adjoining her own where Stephanie was sleeping. Strange yet, having Stephanie here —having a sister. Strange yet good—good every way you thought of it.

"Good for me!" Jerry turned to the hills. So many years she had saluted them on awakening. A ripple of gold lay on the waters; the white Campanile gleamed and pointed upward.

Long ago—oh, when Jerry was eighteen and then nineteen, she used to tell herself with high, brave ignorance: "I ought to turn into a big, decent sort of person, looking at this each day."

Four years had frittered through her fingers while she marked time. Marked time waiting for her mate.

"I must be a terribly female thing by nature or I never could have sunk so deep in it," she now thought as she slowly poked one foot from under the blankets to the floor . . . and shivered noisily. Well—whether she liked the cold or the routine and ordered life, she had to take it now. So that was good!

Had to take it or starve! Rents had come down. Their apartment was old, and so many new ones going up all about it. Less than $150 clear after interest and operating expenses were paid. Some one had to hustle.

"Especially since we like strawberries and cream, thin bacon and fresh eggs!" She went padding to the kitchen and whistled as she cooked breakfast.

She did this each morning, bringing a tray to Stephanie's bed, summoning Marza with an impudent: "Get your carcass in here, ole dear. You're not the baby any more!"

She plunged with a brazen gaiety into the new job, taking a Calvinistic pleasure in the rigorous discipline.

Each morning as she went down the hall, she paused before the poinsettias. They lasted bitterly long. She fingered them and reminded herself in a kind of childish ritual: "I'm out on my own now! Got to be sufficient to myself—utterly!

"No woman who wants to hold a man can afford to lose herself.

"That's Marza's supremacy. She never merged her identity with another's. She kept herself to herself. And so she keeps others to her.

"What man wants a pale shadow of his own thoughts? A synthetic distillation of his own emotions? That's what the average wife becomes—a shadow: and that's what she gives—no wonder husbands are bored! There are mirrors when one wants a reflection."

She developed an elaborate philosophy of independence. And was appalled that it did not suffice nor soothe her.

But she was determined that no one should guess her insane persistent yearning for him—the want that made her start inwardly at the mention of his name.

Above all, Saxon should not see her wilt. He would never find her reproaching him with that execrable feminine: "You took all I had! See how you've hurt me!"

No—she'd played the game and lost. Her fault as much as his, perhaps. Anyway, she'd lost. And no one should see her whimper.

So she wrote breezy answers to his letters. If she had been taunting with a gay kid sweetness before, she would be madly, thrillingly audacious now.

And she said of the poinsettias:

"Saxon, ole darling, you puzzled and wondered what you should send, being as we twain are one no more, didn't you? They are brazen creatures, these gaudy flowers, like the hussy

who received them. And they've a flaunting way of saying: Fare thee well, ole dear, and if forever, then forever fare thee well. That's always a rather sad message, I suppose, but they were high, dear years we had, weren't they? Perhaps we won't either of us ever know such a fine, gorgeous sweetness again. I'm an awfully greedy person and hope. Yet if there come another time, it won't be the same time. I'm glad about it—clean glad. And as you've often remarked, why belittle an emotion because it doesn't remain the same in 1929 as it was in 1922. I better stop or I may wax pollyanish—

"This job isn't so bad. I spent all today with a funny little German who imports from God knows where some very fine etchings. Erskine sent me down to buy the best of them. I had a fine time.

"Erskine has landed the job of decorating the Wilson's new place. It's on Broadway and five stories high. Have you seen it? What a view! I'll have a hand in the color schemes. It will be exciting, as they've no end of money and like to spend it."

She overdid it.

"What of you and Saxon?" said Marza one night as Jerry waited for Hugh Hammond.

"Nothing," said Jerry, putting her hands on her shadowy hips and giving Marza an impudent wink. "Nothing of it! Did you fear there might be?"

They were home a month. She hadn't seen him. Twice on his hurried trips from Los Angeles he had phoned. She had not been home.

Now—just as Hugh, very blond, very cultured and smiling, reached the hall, the phone rang.

It was Saxon: "Hello—I'm coming up . . . caught you home at last."

"Oh, why didn't you let me know? I've got a date."

"Break it." With a cool possessive air.

"If you'd given me half a chance, I would."

"Well—for heaven's sake, Jerry, it's five months since I've seen you. Can't you break a date?"

"I'll come back early. I'll be here at 11. Come then."

"Too late! I've got to catch the 8 o'clock train back in the morning. Must be a pretty heavy date if it's so impossible to break it."

"Don't be snooty! I can't very well break a date when the person is standing here in the hall waiting and we've got tickets for the threater."

"As you please! Good-bye!"

She felt assaulted—burning—weak. She stood at the phone biting her lips—fighting desperately against the impulse to fling herself furiously against Hugh Hammond.

She went to the theater and was utterly miserable. She kept going over that phone conversation and not hearing a line of the play.

She told herself angrily: "Pretty high-hatty—pretty damn high-hatty!"

The next day she got a rather penitent note: "Sorry I was so rough, but I did want to see you and I can't quite figure your attitude. You remember I told you about the Pennings' new place and that I could land the job for you?

"Well, that won't be finished for some time . . . but they want some drapes and other things for their house in town. Will you go out there today and look the place over? I'm enclosing a card. There may not be anyone there. But the maids will take you through. Better luck next time, I hope. I'm terribly disappointed."

* * * * * *

Mary Eunice Pennings received Jerry. She was tall—but her slender frame made her very willowy. Yes—she was appealing with that soft brown hair and shadowed blue eyes. She had charm.

She said very pleasantly: "You're Miss King—an artist friend of Saxon's. Well, let's have a look around. We want the mantel changed for one thing. I'd like a first-rate mural out here in the hall. . . .

"And now in here—"

They were in the living room. It looked on the street. A

machine was slowing at the curb. Someone getting out—Saxon.

For a wild moment the room and Jerry's heart blazed. Oh—calling for her. Delayed in town and following her out here.

Then she noticed Mary Eunice also gazing from the window. And heard Mary Eunice saying: "Well—look about. You can't get any suggestions from me. Make your survey—and let me hear from you Monday. I won't be here over the weekend. . . ."

He was coming up the steps—sleek—mirthful. Now his hat was off and the thick tan hair lifted in the breeze.

Jerry moved into the shadows. She heard Mary Eunice opening the door: heard her husky: "Hello, dear!"

They went with a little run down the steps. Off for the weekend together.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE clock on the mantel rang a chimes. Jerry counted—five-thirty. Well, he hadn't guessed she was here this late. Or he'd never have come up the steps, jauntily, like that. He'd not have come here at all.

She stood gazing in the mirror in a kind of desolation. Gradually her face lost its familiar aspect and she could survey it as a stranger.

The eyes confronted her with soft violet flames and the mouth, sculptured ardently with song and passion challenged.

"What has Mary Pennings got that I lack? What is HER hold?"

She burned with these black insinuations. Her thoughts flew after him. They caught him by the shoulders and scathingly denounced him. Oh, the traitor! Giving up the fine and holy flower for common grass like this.

How mirthful he looked: how chuckling when his hat came off, and he said some laughing thing to Mary Pennings. The way he looked that February four years ago at Del Monte when he stood with tanned, happy face and caught the kiss she blew to him.

Lifting her on wings of ecstasy: flushing her to the inmost heart with a love of him. Hers then.

Why had this beauty vanished? Why had she not bound him to her irrevocably!

She had wished to. She had felt a scorn for the half-hearted half-portion people who postpone and dally and wait for all the secondary things like money and bread: who let the flash and fervor dim before they take their love. Oh, seize today—joyously, utterly—

Presently she was walking about the room, surveying it

with cold, practical yes. "I'll junk that—hideous thing—"

She stopped before the fireplace: "That wasn't what I wanted. That's why I didn't take it," she told herself quietly. "I would have been but another episode to him: but another excitement."

The image of Mary Eunice haunted her. She had beauty, a little coarse-grained perhaps with that faint thickness about her nose and lips. But there was appeal in the shadowed eyes and full, inviting mouth—the whole softened by the willow-grace of her form.

But Mary Eunice was not better looking than Jerry. She hadn't the ardor nor the color. Not very dynamic: not even vital enough to surround herself with beauty when she had all the money in the world.

"You choose it," she had said. "I can't be bothered."

What was it—what was it he found in her? There must be some brilliant charm that made Saxon Rhodes step to her tune.

Thursday in the following week, Jerry stood before the portrait that Sylvia was doing.

"You've made her awfully flat looking, Sylvia. Drab—no sparkle."

"I'm making her as she is—attractively wrapped but empty—a contradiction that constitutes the sole mystery of many women as May Sinclair points out."

"She seems highly attractive."

"Which makes me doubt that men are intelligent. They fall for such obvious tactics. The same old lures that have been worked for centuries get them. And they think these lures are new—inspired by their unique charms! If fish were as conceited as men, the sea would be empty."

Added Sylvia with one of her quaint drolleries: "That's why the intelligent woman so often fails in the love game. She credits the man with sense. She'd be afraid to use the tricks Mary Eunice practices. She imagines a man would see through her as she knows a woman would. But they don't!

"If I ever sat before a man in the intriguing poses of Mary

Eunice: if I ever made eyes and brought velvet tones into my voice and slithered my hands here and there the way Mary Eunice does and found the man falling for it, I'd roll on the floor in laughter. The salvation of Mary Eunice and the source of her attraction is her utter stupidity."

"I can't believe it," said Jerry.

"Well you watch—you'll have a chance to see her in action Saturday night."

"Will she be there?"

"Of course. Saxon is about as close a friend as John has. And it's the weekend—he'll come up for it. Whom else would he bring, since you've given him the gate?"

Saturday, Jerry suffered a near panic with her excitement. It was John's birthday. Rod Porter was giving this party for him in a great studio home that he had builded in Belvidere.

Jerry was going with Hugh Hammond.

And she would see Saxon—their first meeting in five months.

She kept recalling the day in August when he rode across the bay with her . . . recalling that he said: "Not mad with me now, Jerry. Going away but not mad, are you?"

"No—but you're free of me—free as the air."

"I don't want to be free of you. I won't be free."

She had believed. And hoped.

Stephanie pushed her chair to the bureau, following each move that Jerry made with warm, glowing eyes: "You like this Hugh, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Do you like them all a little bit? You're that brilliant kind of person, aren't you? Oh, Lord, I'm longing to get on my feet again. Jerry—I've never been to a real fast party with people getting vastly tight and doing scandalous, hair-raising things." Stephanie gave a little gurgling laugh: "You'll take me, won't you?"

Suddenly a color went splashing to Stephanie's temples: "Do you like Heinie better than Hugh?"

"No—differently."

"Heinie's rather wonderful, isn't he? He's terribly in love with you?"

It came out softly in a little throbbing rush.

Then Stephanie was laughing and pressing a finger against her short upper lip: "Why hasn't Saxon been around? Oh, because he's been in Los Angeles? I wish he'd hurry up and come back. I want to see him . . . see if he's as good as Heinie for you."

"Indeed. And is Heinie good?"

"For anyone, I should think. Coming up here almost every afternoon—all those books and all the candy. Doing that for a mere stranger like me. Jerry, is Saxon as good-looking as Heinie?"

"Heinie—good-looking? What do you mean?"

"Don't you think Heinie handsome? Why his eyes are perfectly beautiful. I adore to look in them. Oh, here—you've a big daub of powder on your neck—let me wipe it off."

The small hands were hot and trembling. Heinie handsome—Jerry wondered.

"There—now you look dark and beautiful, Jerry. You look very supreme."

Jerry gave a quick kiss to her sister. "I hope so. I want to look that way tonight!"

* * * * * * *

She wore a dress of Holland blue. Hugh brought deep purple orchids. The colors that brought the odd lavender glow to her cheeks and eyes—that made the dark hair bluer than it was black. His fine intelligent eyes gave her eager tribute.

"Hugh loves me—but I don't care," she thought moodily. "Nothing matters but him. And he will only keep me from life—keep me from living. Ah—tonight—"

The moment she entered the room she saw him. He saw her. He came with a swift eagerness. He came gaily and caught her hands awakening the old pang, the flush and joy.

"At last! Jerry, at last!"

CHAPTER XXIX

She found the light thrilling eyes warm on hers: found him looking with soft astonishment as though her beauty and her young, high radiance were new and startling.

"Take a good look, big boy."

"And a great deal more than that, if Lady Luck is with me. She mostly is! Miss me, Jerry? Here, I want that little brown hand."

She gave a soft, rippling laugh and let her hand be tucked in his. Sweeter than she had dared to dream. New and sweet.

She stole a look at his profile with the strong line of the jaw, the vital, uneven sculpture of his nose and chin. A slight heaviness about his neck—oh, very slight. A weariness showing in tiny lines about his eyes.

But he grinned—grinned happily in her face: "You're still a darling thing, aren't you? And it's going to be a lot of fun getting acquainted all over again. What say to that, Jerry?"

She blew cigarette smoke in his face and answered breezily: "All clear ahead!"

They sat in the leafy dark of the porch. They talked eagerly, swiftly. He wanted to know what she was thinking: what she was doing. If she liked her job; if she liked her new cousin. Had she missed him—thought much of him? Some of those letters—now they were pretty matter-of-fact and cold. Took a crimp in a fellow, reading them and remembering.

In the music of that voice humming with its deep, secret hilarity: with his warm, rough cheek coming near to hers and with this soft, eager murmur: "We've a few things to

remember, Jerry—dear things—" With this, she was helpless. The months and the discords between them vanished. She let herself down in the ache and tumult.

They danced. Again, then again.

He glanced down, swooping her to him with a teasing: "We like each other. I guess that's all there's to it. You've changed, Jerry. You've a dark, mysterious air like Marza."

"Ah," thought she, "that comes of unrequited love. That comes of anguish and responsibiltiy. But you, Saxon Rhodes, may wonder! You shall never know again: never be sure of me again. To make a man sure, is to make him another's."

"And you wouldn't break that date. That got under my skin. You hadn't seen me for five months. And you wouldn't break a date. A person would do that even for a friend."

"And some friends would wait up till 11 o'clock."

She began to whistle—a gay lilt against his heart: "Keeping Y.M.C.A. hours, are you?"

"I was sore," said he, brushing his chin in the soft wave of her hair. "Are you telling me the truth, Jerry? Is all really clear ahead?"

"How about one Saxon Rhodes since this is the night of confession?"

"You should know. I follow the father of the country and avoid entangling alliances. Good way for the nation to keep peace and mere man to avoid wars.

"And I'm not having the slightest trouble, Jerry!" He was suddenly lowering his head, suddenly whispering with his lips against her cheek, "I was never in danger but once, Jerry, don't turn away. Look up, please. I want to look in your eyes and tell you this—your blue, sweet eyes. . . ."

"No—don't—Saxon—"

"Yes—there—look up!" And with the old caressing sweep of his eyes over her face: "Jerry, there was never a girl before you. I mean really. Never one that counted more than an hour, before you. And I'm beginning to fear, beginning to know there won't be one after you—"

Bathing her in the thrilling flame of his eyes: bringing her

to her knees in hope and worship. She stood motionless there in the shadowed porch; motionless in his arms.

She stood white and smiling, feeling the world obliterated with the touch of his lips on hers.

If he had taken her hand then, she would have followed wherever he led. She would have gone with him—unquestioning—anywhere. Her whole being became passive, unresistant, flowed out to him in a soft, undulant flame.

* * * * * * *

In a dream, lost in a dream, she watched opalescent clouds drifting about the dark peak of Angel Island. She listened to music. Tears filled her eyes and a strange pang and rapture mingled in her heart.

She could not return to the dancing—could not go back to others.

From the shadow of the porch she watched the dancers. Inga in there, a joyous Kewpie with her wide, rippling mouth and bright red hair. Inga singing as John played—singing to him, "There's something nice about everyone, but everything nice about you!"

Jerry pressed her cheeks against the moist leaves of a blooming acacia: against the soft, golden streamers. And longed to be lost in the darkness: mingled and lost in the infinite music of the night.

Starry-eyed and the mist in her hair she came down the dim porch in answer to Hugh's half frightened: "Jerry, where are you?"

She smiled dreamily: "It was so lovely out here—so quiet and sweet."

"Ah," said he, his thin, pale face now anxious. "You're not enjoying yourself."

"I am—beautifully."

"But alone. You don't really like these parties, do you? I've an idea that you're less of this generation, though you seem more of it than anyone here—"

Another time she would have liked to talk of this—liked to say how hard she thought it was to be worthwhile: to be a

person Today. Oh, much harder than for one's mother. Who can resist a tidal wave?

What of this now? What of anything?

"They've all or nearly all gone down to the Yacht Club. They'll be back for supper. Shall we join them?"

She shook her head. "Is that John playing?"

"Yes—John and Inga."

"Let us go down here, Jerry, into the garden."

"This," said she, aroused by the sudden, sweet pleading look about his mouth, aroused and frightened. "This is better, Hugh. If you like," which she knew he didn't, "we'll go in and dance."

* * * * * * *

Midnight. Gay voices floating up the path. Singing and hilarity.

"Whee," said little Nellie Spear, whirling like a top in the middle of the floor, "dance with me, Hughie, darling. And I'll give you a whiff of seventeen golden phizzes. They were knockouts!"

They came thronging and stamping to the porch, to the garden, to the machines. The trees came to life with color and dim, moving forms.

Ora Pringle, a rather flaunting Juno now with her eyes and cheeks flushed, swept about her partner—the two of them wrapped together, began to dance.

Mary Pennings beckoned to John.

"Now watch!" whispered Sylvia with a droll grimace.

Mary linked her arm in John's. Their faces were on a level. Quite openly—quite debonairly, Mary raised hers. Her lips closed dreamily, deliberately on John's.

"Nothing stupid about that," said Jerry intrigued by the audacity. She looked about eagerly—smiling and waiting. Where was he? Why didn't he come?

Then she was following Hugh to the garden: "Too warm here—they've all acquired a beautiful edge. Now the night begins. Jerry dear—look out there—the moonlight on the water. Walk down there—"

She followed absently, dreamily—a song in her ears: "Never a girl before you, Jerry—and now I know there can never be another after you—you only—"

They passed shrubs—a bench in the shadows.

Two forms there, the man's arms wound about the girl.

Hurry. She caught Hugh's hand, pushed him on. But in that moment the man in the shadow spoke. Saxon's voice—ah, surely not his voice saying that!

And his arms wound so about Ora Pringle.

She gave a soft, inarticulate murmur and would have hidden her face.

Too late. Saxon with his arms relaxing, gazed full into Jerry's burning eyes.

CHAPTER XXX

HALF an hour later they came face to face.

"Jerry—listen!"

"Oh, blah! Great little sofa-sheik you've turned out to be! Get them going and coming, don't you? Winsome wag! The grand little go-getter of the secondhand dames! Big victory, isn't it? Worth drinking up your looks—"

A subtle, electrifying change made his eyes hard: "Drinking? You've never seen me drunk in your life!"

"I've not seen you teeter. Haven't seen it get your legs. That's why it's getting your head—eating up your ambition and your ideals and your fineness."

"Don't rant, Jerry. My work speaks for itself."

"A damn sight better for you, Saxon Rhodes, if you were a bit less brilliant. And if you did roll in the gutter after your dozen drinks. Then you'd be humble and take stock of yourself. Instead of your boastful school-boy pride that you can stand up and take your liquor like a traveled gentleman. Time you got over being seventeen. Before all your hairs falls out and your jowls get any thicker."

That struck him funny. He went over to a mirror and ran a hand through the thick, tan hair. "'Tis a bit thin at the temples. Gives one an intellectual look."

"Oh, you could boob a corpse out of the coffin. Make it feel like an ass for dying. Go to it—rationalize your own decline. You'll hit bottom sooner. But you'll be so damn soft by then you won't feel the fall: won't even know you've fallen.

"You'd be further ahead, ole dear, it you'd guts enough to cut the rationalizing and swallow remorse now and then."

"Same little censor, aren't we? Same little custodian of

men and morals? Up to you to keep the cock-eyed world going straight. Divine right of wives et cetera!"

That landed clean and bitter between the eyes. She saw him coming with a grin, half sneer, half patronage: "Here, have a drink, you'll feel better."

She wished to hurl it in his face. She was white to the lips. But she thought, blazing: "He doesn't win tonight!"

She took the glass and tossed it off: "To the cocky cavalier! Don Juan in rompers! Cheerio!"

He didn't like that and showed his teeth in a mean scowl. She flung a bright, derisive laugh, cutting off his answer with an icy: "Over the river, ole dear! Call again when you've a new bag of tricks!"

Strung tight as though she would snap in two—she felt like this. She walked swiftly, her head arrogantly high and that bright, derisive laughter fixed on her lips.

She met Hugh and with the same false glitter snatched his glass and drained it.

He gave her a whimsical, startled look. She shrugged.

And now they were standing at the garden wall and she was aware of his face, clean-cut and likable, the moonlight enhancing its pallor, his face with a strained smile, turned to hers.

"Why did you snatch my glass, Jerry?"

"Thirst."

"I know. But liquor won't satisfy it . . . not your kind of thirst."

"Will anything? It's a rather disappointing world, isn't it? Nobody's satisfied. And we're always looking for an escape. Weighted with ourselves and the hum-drumness of living.

"With the whole ocean to roam, mountains to climb and skies to fly, you'd think we could make a wild, glittering adventure of it, wouldn't you? You'd think we'd be living furiously, jealous of each moment that eluded us: afraid that the time to die would arrive before we'd half gone through the blazing joy that living ought to be.

"What's wrong, I wonder, that we don't have a seething time in such a vast, thrilling playground?

"No wonder God has gone. He must have passed out of the picture in utter chagrin when he saw what pipsqueaks we turned out to be.

"With mad moments, sixty an hour handed to us free, all we can think of is to flop on sofas and languish in somebody's arms!"

The smile on Hugh's face broadened, rippled into a deep laugh. "That's not always an expression of poor humanity's incompetence, is it?

"You don't know how to play here in America. At least, it seems so to me. At Tahoe during the holidays the tavern was crowded. There was snow on all the mountains. In Switzerland, the whole population would be out skiing. They'd be going mad with the pleasure of it.

"It's the sport of kings. But there we sat around bridge tables playing a cent a point and drinking high-balls. Letting the snow and the magnificent fun of it melt away. All but a few game wardens who were enjoying themselves. One of these loaned me a pair of skiis. We went to the summit. It was wonderful. But no one in the crowd could be induced to try the sport."

"Yet we all dream of seizing brilliant adventures," she answered, watching a yacht, poised delicate and phantom-like—a white butterfly on the water. "We all look forward to sweeping, golden loves and beautiful excitements.

"But this is the way our nights and days vanish."

"They need not, Jerry. You don't enjoy this—most of us don't. You can find the rich, satisfying life. You can find what you want—all that you want."

"Where?"

She glanced up suddenly to find that intent pleading sweetness hovering like a presence on his mouth.

At her question this quirked off in a laugh. "Why, with me, Jerry. With me if you'd care to look. Really—would you consider me at all?"

The oddest proposal she had ever received. Only his eyes, softly lighted and dark turned with a strained, seeking look to hers—touching her warmly.

"Will you consider me, Jerry?"

"Are you asking me to marry you, Hugh?"

"Not very cleverly. But in great earnestness. Yes—would you marry me, Jerry?"

Slowly—resting her chin in her hands. "I'd like to marry you, Hugh. But I'm not thinking of marriage. And I'm not wanting to marry. I'm all against it. And I couldn't now, anyway. I have to earn. I need greatly to earn."

"I'm not poor, Jerry. We'd have a delightful time together. Why should you be against marriage?"

"Oh, I think it a fatal mistake to marry for happiness. I think a person should find happiness and satisfaction first and marry second. You don't become happy through marriage any more than you become pop-eyed through it."

"You said you'd like to marry me, why?"

"I like you. There's a nicety about you that I crave in men."

"Perhaps you'll think me over then? Jerry, we could be very gay together. You're somewhat of a vagabond and I'm wholly one. And if you'd give me half a chance I could be most awfully nice."

She was held by the solemn sweetness of his eyes—fascinated by this, so intent against the light play of words.

He did not attempt to kiss her—did not even clasp her hands. And yet she felt a terrible earnestness—a suffering eagerness even in his laugh.

* * * * * * *

She lay awake and contrasted this attitude of Hugh's with the look, half patronage, half sneer, on Saxon's face. Oh, what a sap—what an utter fool to have succumbed to that power of his? To have melted in his arms—to have stood there white and motionless feeling the world obliterated when his lips touched hers.

She recalled this and was crushed with self-contempt. She

lay very quiet, eyes burning and a fixed smile on her lips. Yes—if he had taken her hand, she would have followed wherever he led!

Her heart throbbed hotly—Wherever he led!

She hated him. She would never stir to him again. She would crush that insane, stupid thing—that fool Jerry King who clamored and yearned for him—

Again and again and again the two Saxons marched before her—the one with warm, beautiful eyes summoning hers with that: "Never one before you—never another after you—"

And the other, hard, sneering: "Same little censor—keep the cock-eyed world straight, won't you!"

She was white and sick with it. "I'm going to sleep!" she determined angrily. "TO SLEEP!"

* * * * * * *

Wednesday she was alone in the shop.

She turned at a step and for a moment stared mutely. Saxon was coming toward her. He looked thin and eager and very young.

CHAPTER XXXI

Saxon came with an uncertain grin as though dubious of his welcome. He wore a brown suit with a faint red line and a snappy crimson tie. His eyes sparkled as though he'd been to bed early for a night or two.

"Well," thought Jerry, noting the pleasing details and excited by his sudden entrance. "What now!"

"I've landed you some good jobs," said he, the grin widening. "One here in town and a beaut in Monterey. Here's the hop."

He pulled a little card from his pocket, laid it on the table before which she was perched on a high, rickety stool.

He did all this with a great briskness like a small boy rushing in with glib chatter and a fist full of flowers to cover up the breaking of the neighbor's window. Oh, nobody'd be mean enough to notice that!

"Do you get a commission for the jobs you land on your own?"

"I've been promised it. I've only been here two months."

He looked over her shoulder at the sketch of a lovely interior —a living room and hall. "It's a pity to waste your gift on stuff like this. Your coloring is awfully good, Jerry. Do you think you'll stay on at this?"

"Yes. There's a great fascination in it. And if you keep landing me heavenly jobs, I'll be wealthy."

"There's no particular reason why I shouldn't be interested in you, is there?"

A sudden darkening of his eyes as they took courage and glanced with faint hostility to hers: "Any reason why we shouldn't be good friends, Jerry?"

"None that I know. Didn't I just remark that you were

a golden asset? Besides," with a quick rippling laugh, and recalling the bitter, contemptuous names she had flung at him —cocky cavalier, Don Juan in rompers—"Besides, you're a big boy, and I like you very much."

This was unexpected and brought a flush to his cheeks. He counted on reproaches and a hurt attitude. Or at best a silent contempt.

He was a little nonplussed: "Then you're not angry with me?"

"No. Not at all."

"But you were. I feel awfully—"

He hesitated and she broke in with an impish: "I know—you feel awfully caught!"

There was something subtly derisive in her banter as though his infidelity were of no consequence. Much more flattering to have incited her furious anger.

He wouldn't believe that she didn't care.

"You were furious the other night. You handed me a filthy line."

She swung round on the stool and with an engaging twinkle puffed smoke in his face. "Yes. You see, it was this way. I was young and innocent. And in my tender youth, which mercifully has vanished, I idealized you. A sun-god with the mirth and breeze of all outdoors about you. A he-man from the great open spaces.

"I saw you head and shoulders above the common herd. One writing his name on the stars. One who couldn't be swayed or sunk.

"And it got me all at once to see you going the way of all flesh; gamboling on the green with that captivating young ox lying in your arms."

"That's going a bit strong, isn't it?"

She ignored him with a bland smile: "Another thing that got me was that you tried to slip it over on me. And without necessity. You insulted my great intelligence telling me I was the only one and then allowing me to find you with another one. Very poor technique!"

He grew uncomfortably red and wished to defend himself. He was in a difficult and unfair position. For he had meant the things he said to her. She WAS the only girl he ever loved. And he DIDN'T expect to love in the same way again. That's all he told her. It was the truth.

Of course, he had liked saying it in that intimate, provocative way; had enjoyed bringing the fervor to her warm, sweet eyes, looking down at her and caressing her with a glance. Aware and exultant in his power to bring her lips trembling and eager to his. A delicious game!

He couldn't tell Jerry this.

With an illuminating flash more surprising to herself than to him, she took the thought from his mind.

"But I've sized it all up and I've got the straight of it. I see you as you are. And to understand is to condone. The sun-god is playing school with the lounge-lizards.

"They've some very exciting games. Making love is one of them. I see the lure of that. Brings a throb to the heart to try one's power over another.

"Only remember this, Saxon, the woman doesn't live who plays a clean, straight hand at that game. They've all a trump card up their sleeves. And sooner or later they bring it down. When they play—you pay!

"It's Lohengrin and going-grin for you!"

"Not I! The survival of marriage proves the blind stupidity or the insane optimism of the race. Take that party the other night—fourteen girls all under twenty-five. Eight of them married and divorced. And they started out with the same fool delusion—marry and be happy ever afterwards! It doesn't work! And I don't fall for it."

"So all the benedicts of the world have boasted. But nearly every man dies married.

"Watch out, ole dear. Seeing that I'm not going to wed you myself, I warn you that all other women are in a conspiracy to nab you. And they're all WORTHLESS!"

"How do you know you're not going to marry me?"

"Well, I've got to be about God's business at present, which

is to make a worthwhile person out of one Jerry King. And to pay the family bills, which are large."

"You don't care for me any more, Jerry?"

"Oh vanity; yes, I care. Enough to give me a broken heart when I see your hair getting thin at the temples. But that's the great little mama in me, I suppose. Want to keep you sweet and pure like you never were, perhaps!"

Lavender eyes soft against the blue-black hair, arms wound about her hunched knees. Slim woodland sprite poised for a brief rest. Like this she sat above him that dewy morning on the hilltop. Like this she had turned with delicious kid sweetness and asked him poignantly to judge her worth.

"Don't you love me, Jerry?"

"He can't help playing the game," thought she with hot unhappiness, "even when he knows a person's heart is his."

She answered after a long musing: "Love. For a girl that means to be on your knees. To be looking up. To be worshipping. The woman doesn't live who truly loves a man that she doesn't look up to. She may have a humorous affection for him or a nice, comfortable middle aged tolerance, or a half-motherly tenderness. But real, bone-deep mate-love can't exist for a woman when she no longer looks up to her man."

She turned about quickly and gathered up her sketches. She had said too much. She was always saying irrevocable things! Making the barrier impassable—making it seem like that.

He colored hotly: "I've fallen quite low in your opinion! You think I drink and chase and am an all-around rotter!"

She was dismayed at the sudden unpleasant turn. She turned eagerly and came shrugging up and tucked a hand in his arm: "No, I don't. Don't think that at all. Quit gnashing your teeth and acting Romeo! And don't get sore because a sap of a school-girl clapped a halo on your head and doesn't think you're wearing it quite straight.

"Were you planning on driving me home? I'm in a hurry."

She went talking on—arrogant—casual. Friends—they would be breezy and chummy.

She thought: "He's having his fling. Same as I would! As I may! Being he, it can't last long. He can't fall for that shabby stuff for very, very long!"

How deep he was enmeshed in this shabby stuff she learned to her dismay a few weeks later.

CHAPTER XXXII

Sylvia finished the portrait of Mary Eunice Pennings. She gave the nose and lips which were slightly thick in the model, a refining touch. Mary Eunice insisted on this and was charmed with the result.

She proclaimed Sylvia great, and by way of heralding her genius gave a bridge-tea. The portrait was displayed and Sylvia acclaimed.

The Pennings lived in Broadway. The house was large and old-fashioned, rising like an embattlement on the steep slopes above Vallejo street.

It was late when Jerry arrived. Only half a dozen guests remained. They were having gin rickeys and settled about a card-table in the pleasing depths of very intimate conversations.

Someone touched off a bomb with this:

"Poor Edith Taylor—that rat hasn't paid her any alimony for seven months."

"Oh, why should he?" impatiently queried Inga. "Why should a man pay alimony to a woman who bore him no child and in all probability didn't even earn her keep while encroaching on his bed and board?"

"Well, she was married to him," offered Mary Eunice, as one settling the problem definitely. Mary wore black chiffon like her replica on the wall. The shadowy gauze enhanced her slenderness and the pearl-pallor of her face.

"And she didn't wish to divorce him. She practically had to. At least, she's entitled to compensation."

"For what? She had bed, board and keep in return for the three years of misery she gave Bud Taylor. She's husky and unencumbered. Why should a man with whom she no longer lives pay her a life annuity? Why is it decent for a

married woman to demand money from a man because she lived with him in the past, and indecent for a frail sister to accept it for the favors of today?"

"Well," said Nellie Spears, "Bud Taylor took her from a good home where her father was glad to support her. The husband promised to keep her for life. He certainly has no right, child or no child, to dump her back penniless. What's she going to do?"

"In other words, a woman has got to be kept by one man or another—by a father because he was foolish enough to beget her; or by an ex-husband because the law forces him.

"Isn't it just possible that free ladies in the day of emancipation might be taken seriously and asked to look out for themselves?"

Inga, never held for more than a flash or two, and secretly disliking the company of women, now drifted to the piano and began to sing.

As is the way with all social conversation, the theme was immediately tangled and lost in a mesh of personalities.

"The most interesting part of the Taylor affair isn't the alimony," said Mary Eunice, "nor is it poor Edith's penury.

"It's Hope Bradford and Jane Burke. They're neck and neck, and the race has two months to run. I wonder which will lead Bud to the altar when his final decree is granted?

"What do women see in Bud Taylor—homely, uncouth fellow? I sat across from him at dinner the other night and was almost carried out each time the fork proceeded to his mouth. I finally asked why he didn't get a steam shovel," said Mary, recalling her bon mot with pride. "What attraction has a man like that, I ask?"

"Sit next to him, not across. Talk to him for a while. What attraction has a man like Hobart Williams? Why do women go crazy over a runt like him and leave a magnificent fellow like Rob Ashe unclaimed?"

They fell immediately into a heated discussion of the sex appeal of the various men they knew—the way of it—also its quality and quantity.

They compared Hobart Williams, Rob Ashe, Rod Porter, Saxon and John.

Hobart Williams, who was short and bull-necked, was voted the possessor supreme of that "intangible something" which brings women chastened and otherwise to their knees.

John came second—Saxon was a doubtful third.

"He's too sarcastic," said Nellie Spears. "He makes you uncomfortable."

"No," said Mary, "the reason is deeper. Hobart attracts more women because more women attract him. Saxon doesn't really care for the mere woman of it. He has to be intrigued by a personality before he bothers to be interesting."

"But Hobart loves all women. He couldn't talk to a washwoman without making her feel a queen. He'd really be interested in bringing a flush to an old woman's eyes. He loves the game for itself. And if he were in heaven he'd try to intrigue the angels. He can't help it.

"Saxon's hold on the woman he wants to hold would be deeper than Hobart's."

"So that's that!" thought Jerry, noting Mary's slim crossed legs and the gleam of white skin through the chiffon inches and inches above her knees.

* * * * * * *

Jerry and Sylvia walked home together.

"Saxon is in deep with Mary Eunice," said Sylvia, the sea-gray eyes wide open now and regarding Jerry quietly.

"Seems so. Why do you say she's stupid? I thought that comparison between Hobart and Saxon rather incisive."

Sylvia gave a droll smile: "Mary's a good rememberer. She culls a phrase from me, a phrase from you and flings it back in your very teeth as her own. She brought up the subject of man's attraction one day while she was posing. If I don't do her wrong, she was quoting me. Only I gave it more of a flourish and went into the subject in convincing detail. Mary's a poser—she's a fake. You'll soon find out."

"But she seems to get by with rather intelligent men."

"That's easy. She's good-looking, enormously conceited and

pleasantly dumb. No man can resist this triumvirate of female charm.

"There's only one combination that beats it—beauty, intelligence and real, born-in-the-marrow 'it.' Where and how often do you meet the woman with these qualities blended in right proportion?

"How often do you meet the person, whether man or woman, who is natively attractive? The person who by merely sitting in a room without opening eyes or lips, would yet make their appeal felt?

"Real sex charm is this kind of unconscious emanation like the perfume from a flower. And it's rare as snow on a sunflower.

"Marza has it. She's a shining example of what I mean." Sylvia turned with an abrupt, appraising look at Jerry.

"In lesser degree, you've got it."

"Then your theory's all wrong, Sylvia. My combination, whatever it is, lost out to Mary Eunice."

"You didn't want him. That is you didn't want him as he is or as he is becoming. You didn't lose out to Mary Eunice, but to an army—the great army of the gin-swigging gents and the gold-digging dames. Oh, land of the free and home of the brave! Such have we become!

"Wasn't it rich to hear the kept ladies talking about their keepers? And prating of freedom! Free to starve if papa or hubby ever decide to cut them loose.

"Is Saxon engaged to Mary?"

"I don't think so."

"He must be," insisted Sylvia, unaware of the jolt she was handing Jerry. "He must be or he wouldn't have fallen for her proposition."

"I didn't hear her proposition," said Jerry, tightening.

"You know, of course, that he's out for that $40,000 Melhurst University competition?"

"He told me of it. I thought it great that he was going to try."

"Well—it takes months of work to enter a competition like

that . . . mapping out the whole building scheme. And it costs thousands of dollars.

"Mary Eunice, as I understand, is going to back him. Mary may be dumb, but she's never disinterested. If she's backing him, she's getting him."

"Why should Mary Eunice back him?" asked Jerry with sharp matter-of-factness. "What's the matter with his uncle?"

"He's tied up with some big residence tract that's to rival Beverly Hills, so I understand. That's why Paul has gone to Los Angeles and sent Saxon back here. It's quiet in town so Saxon has time to go out for this prize. If he wins it, his fortune is made."

"Did Mary Eunice tell you all this."

"Oh, one day Mary came for a sitting. She was exceedingly spiffed and began to boast. She got quite sentimental and said she was going to make Saxon the greatest architect in the country. He had the stuff and she was going to bring it out. The winning of the Melhurst prize would be the beginning of it. 'I've finally won him over to that,' she said, 'I'm staking him. A girl can do anything she wants with a man when he's mad for her.'

"Someone ought to wise him up to the messy trap he's stepping into!"

"And you think I should be that someone?"

"Yes! If you ever gave a damn for him."

* * * * * * *

Late Thursday afternoon a very nervous and high-strung Jerry casually dropped into the office of Saxon Rhodes.

She took pains that she was looking her most alluring. And she conjured all her resources; ordered her wit and impudence; her gaiety and audacity to be ready to do their uttermost.

A lone draughtsman was sitting before his board, rather idly studying blue prints.

"Mr. Rhodes is not in town," he answered, pulling the sleeves down over a thin, hairy arm and preparing to leave.

"Is he in Los Angeles?"

For the first time the man looked up. "Oh, aren't you Miss

King? Mr. Rhodes left a message for you. I was to mail it tonight. He's gone east. He'll be gone a month. You might as well take the letter."

"A month?"

"Yes—he's gone on business."

Jerry walked down the corridor to the stairs. She remembered the day she stood here watching Ora Pringle leaving Saxon's door. How wild she had been then! But what a flaming satisfying rage that was compared to this arid desolation!

Half way down the stairs she opened his letter. There were the names of several people whom he thought she should see. He had spoken of her and felt certain she could make these jobs.

He was gone to Melhurst to look over the site of the university.

"I'm going into this, Jerry, with everything I've got! I'm chancing my life on it, and I've got to win. I think I will."

Jerry folded the letter quietly. Mary had won.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Mary Eunice Pennings enveloped in chiffons of lavender and jade, invited Jerry to share an eleven-thirty breakfast. Mary was draped enchantingly on a Louis Sixteenth chaise longue, her arms clasped behind her head, her legs, which were bare, doubled back in little-girl fashion, half under her. Jerry felt it a pity so alluring a pose should be wasted.

"Listen, Jerry," said Mary Eunice, "I'd like this room done all in black—perhaps a dash of orange, but something very startling and Arabian. I'm sick of rose and blue. I want something strong and eccentric, more like myself than these simpering colors. I think a black bedroom would give a great touch of mystery. I think it's quite what I want."

Jerry concealed a grin: "Purple of a rich but mellow shade would be just as striking and much more becoming to your complexion. The room ought to furnish a subtle background.

"Think how like a funeral black in a bedroom would be. I've read of nuns who had coffins put in their cells to remind them that death was near."

"Hardly a helpful hint in my bedroom," said Mary, with wicked tones. "But you know this house is mine now and I'm going to have it done over from the attic to the second basement. I wish you'd make me a sketch of each room as you think it should be—then we'll go over them together.

"I want the house comfortable. So that a man would like it."

Jerry very faintly raised her eyebrows. She thought quickly: "What a grand little joke on me if I decorate a house for Saxon and her!"

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He was gone three and a half weeks and on the homeward trip now.

There were letters that puzzled and thrilled Jerry. Letters like those he sent from Paris—full of his burning enthusiasm. He sent inspired sketches of his general scheme and asked her to write back what she thought of them.

She answered ardently, urging him to greater, more flaming efforts. She never dropped a hint of the information Sylvia had given. For she knew instinctively that a thing like this written in cold black and white becomes doubly poisonous. It would only make him darkly ferocious.

And it would harass him so that he would be unable to work with concentration. It would furiously shame him to know that Mary Eunice prattled of their bargain—if indeed such a bargain they had between them.

Let him get all he could from the trip. The money was spent, anyway. He should have enough to pay for this expense. When he returned she would visit him, and, if possible, subtly warn him against involving himself with ANYONE on the money angle.

In this, at least, she would block Mary Eunice.

Whenever they met—and this was frequently—a feeling of combat dominated Jerry. She would think: "I'm better looking than you! I've more head, and God help us if I haven't a better soul! It's inconceivable that he should choose you to me. And I'm out to see that he DOESN'T. I'm out to beat you!"

She took a defiant joy in this contest. It made her arrogant. She felt sometimes as though she were made of fire, and other times, reckless and triumphant as though made of wine.

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Now, sitting here sipping coffee from Mary's fine French china, she said impishly. "Well, different men like different things. What type of man, Mary, do you seek to please?"

Mary smiled dreamily, as one who has her choice of the earth's heroes: "The real kind. Jerry—you and Saxon are close friends, aren't you?"

"We've known each other for years."

"You were engaged for years, weren't you? It was quite generally known—so I've heard. The breaking of an engagement, I should imagine worse than the severing of a marriage."

"Why?"

"After marriage comes disillusion. After disillusion the parting is welcome.

"But even today, few people are engaged long enough and intimately enough to be thoroughly disillusioned. I imagine that for the girl there would always remain a residue of hope?"

Mary's shadowed blue eyes for a fleeting moment searched Jerry's.

These laughed at her: "That's the usual way of imagining it, Mary. The girl on the screen and in books is always pictured as Doleful Dolores or Weeping Elaine. I suppose Virgil started it all when he had poor Dido climb to the flaming couch and burn herself out with unrequited love."

"How's that for telling the wind's will?" she thought with a tang of exultation.

"I suppose it is an old-fashioned viewpoint. But I can't feature being friends with a man I once loved. I don't see how either one can enjoy or tolerate such a relation. Yet you and Saxon seem to enjoy each other's company very much. He writes to you, doesn't he?"

"And to you too, Mary?"

A flash across the clear, satin-like skin.

Jerry grinned in her coffee-cup: "Didn't like that, ole dear, did you? Puts us on a level! Better watch my step or I'll boob myself out of this excellent job!"

But she went on casually: "I wonder if he has much chance of winning that prize?"

"Why, of course. I'm confident he'll win—absolutely confident."

"Did you like his sketches that much, Mary?"

"Don't be silly. He's not made any sketches yet. He's only gone on a survey of the site.

"He'll have a great advantage over the men who couldn't

take the trip. He'll be able to suit the architecture to the contour of the land."

"But it costs quite a bit—a trip like that."

"The whole competition will be expensive. But I don't think Saxon is going to worry over the money end of it."

"I think he WILL worry over that," said Jerry.

Mary closed her eyes over mysterious smiles. She was not spiffed and would make no boasts today. "Most likely he's figured the cost and made provision of some kind to meet it."

Jerry came from this meeting with two convictions warring in her mind. Mary was not engaged to Saxon. She was too eager to discover Jerry's position; too openly anxious to learn just how much Jerry might still be counting on him.

So she wasn't sure of her own hold. They were not engaged, but he had permitted her to supply him with the needed funds.

The more she considered this, the more improbable and distasteful it became.

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He returned. She made an excuse of business and went to his office.

Three draughtsmen were working. The room was charged with an intent, burning concentration. Saxon was shut off in Paul's office. No one made any move to announce Jerry.

"He may be out in a few moments," one of the men offered.

Jerry waited.

"He's in this too deep now," she thought excitedly. "He won't stop if he has to get the money from hell. The money's of no consequence!"

He opened the door. The tan, fighting face was lean and sharply drawn with the line of restraint that thrilled her.

He saw Jerry. With a quick grin: "Been wanting to see you. Been wanting to get up to the shop. But I've had to get going. Time's awfully short. I'm afraid to lose a minute," said he, brushing his hair swiftly. "How are you?"

He looked so clean and intent and nervous; so boyishly pleased to see her.

He couldn't be in Mary Penning's clutches and look like this!

"You're awfully thin and beautiful!" said Jerry laughing and surveying him with open pleasure.

"Left wine and all my women at home. So I'd no choice but to be good. And keep the hair on my temples. I'll have to do that for some time. Walk the chalk line, which you'll be pleased to hear."

"You're going into it with an awful bang, aren't you?"

"I've got to. I'm late in starting. Lost months scheming around on ways and means."

"Is Paul in with you on it? At all?"

"He'll help with suggestions, of course. But the scheme will be mine—and the risk."

"You mean the money end of it? Paul isn't going to back you for the cost?"

"He can't. He's tied up in the south."

"It's going to take a heap of money, isn't it? With three men working? You shan't have to mortgage your soul for it, I hope."

"It's going to cost plenty," said he slowly. "I've got it figured out to the pennies. I think I've just about enough to get by."

"All on your own, Saxon?"

He reached for a pad and paper and began to figure—smiling as he did so. "Lady Luck was with me last year. I made some good money. And despite my wild ways, saved most of it."

He set down initials and opposite these were figures. "Some nice juicy jobs that I landed myself in the last year and a half, Jerry. I've $5500—"

"Oh, you've $5500 all your own!"

"And I figure it will just about squeak me by. If I lose, I'll be cleaned. But Jerry, if I win!"

He grinned down at her with eager, exultant youngness. "Do you think me a fool to have gambled it all, everything on this one chance?"

"Oh," said she, brimming with relief and hypnotized by his fervor, "you won't lose. Even if you lose, you win, going into it like this."

It could scarcely be plainer. He had $5500 of his own. He would get by on this and no thanks to Mary Pennings!

Perhaps Mary wanted to back him. Perhaps Mary hoped his funds would dwindle so that she could furnish money and share in the glory of victory. So that she could go about saying: "I'm going to make Saxon the greatest architect in the country. He has the stuff and I'll bring it out!"

Jerry was convinced that Saxon knew nothing of these feminine dreams.

"Well, glad to see you up and at it, ole dear!"

"What's your hurry?" said he, grabbing her hand as she turned to leave. "Stick around a bit and let's chat. I've a minute. How are things going with you, Jerry?"

"Too quickly when it's silk stockings."

"And other things."

"Such as love in a bungalow?" said she, whistling a merry "Hello, Cutie!"

"Yes—such as love in London. I heard you and Hugh Hammond are engaged. Is that true?"

"Engaged! Why, my dear benighted Victorian, I should hope I know better than to clutter up the world with needless activity. Didn't you tell me a girl doesn't need to marry to-day? The game is hers as well as his. She may play. She need not pay!"

"Not you!"

She gave him a taunting smile: "Is that tribute or insult?"

"Mere truth. Jerry, am I a complete fadeout?"

She stood at the draughting board where his papers were neatly arranged. He stood beside her, holding to her hand. His eyes against his browned skin were lighter, more intent and now fixed eagerly on her warm, singing mouth.

"Well," said she, pursing her lips and blowing upward a long, delicate curl of smoke: "It's this way, as Dorothy Parker puts it:

"'Woman wants monogamy:
Man delights in novelty.
Love is woman's moon and sun;
Man has other forms of fun.
Woman lives but in her lord;
Count to ten and man is bored.
With this, the gist and sum of it,
What earthly good can come of it?'"

"Clever, but what does it make me, Jerry?"

She laughed and pulled from him, quoting with a shrug:

"'Free, my love, to seek your newer way!
I'll not be left in sorrow.
So long as I have yesterday,
Go take your damned tomorrow!'"

From the door she blew him a kiss:

"I'd like that better at closer range, Jerry!"

"Gone are the snows of yesteryear!" With her hand on the knob and her face averted, so that he, reaching her side, saw only her snug blue hat and the black curl trailing saucily up from her ear: "Saxon, good luck to you! I'm glad you're into it all on your own. I'm awfully thrilled about that."

"It's harder but it's better."

"Yes—the triumph is complete!"

She felt happier than in all the months since their parting. She had seen him again as he was when she first loved him: when the dream of him—young, strong, beautiful, going onward, upward and onward, had filled and inspired her thought.

This dream was real. He was all that she fancied him or he could be all this. She believed now with the eternal faith of the woman in love that he would be this. And she was glad. Even though she lost him.

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CHAPTER XXXIV

With a sense of triumphant peace, Jerry hurried home. Evenings were sweet since the coming of Stephanie. The two girls, both knowing long years of loneliness would often talk far into the night.

This evening Jerry found Stephanie alone and with a vast surprise. As Jerry stepped into the room, she called: "Jerry —quick—go over to that bureau drawer. There's a little jewel case. Something to show you."

Jerry brought a curious little ivory box carved with most delicate Chinese ladies.

"Did Marza give you this?" she asked softly. "I remember it when I was a little girl. I remember seeing Marza sitting with this box opened in her lap. She always closed it and put it away when I came in."

"My father gave it to her. Did you ever see this picture of him, Jerry? And this one of Marza and me? She gave it to me today."

Jerry took the three medallions framed in small, jeweled circles not much larger than a dollar. The face of a man about Saxon's age with laughing youth uppermost: the haunting face of a beautiful girl with troubled, passionately luring eyes—Marza in the charm and wonder of her twenties: and the face of a child about three—a little girl with merry, laughing lips and elfin sweetness. Three figures in the tragic romance.

Jerry, lost in fascination and stirred to her inmost fiber by this flash into Marza's thrilling and terrible secret, absently took a bit of paper that Stephanie now offered.

"Read that!"

She gazed at it and sat stiffly, tremblingly upright.

"Marza gave you this! She's known this all along?"

"She didn't mean to give it to me. Didn't know it was in the box. It was hidden in this envelope and dropped out. There are others of later date."

The notice was a clipping from the personal column of a newspaper. It was yellowed with age. Across the top in Marza's hand was dated: September 14, 1911.

With quick and almost choking breath Jerry read:

"Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Stephanie Marsh, five year old daughter of Stephen Marsh, Jr., please communicate with Stephen Marsh, First National Bank building, New York. Liberal reward."

"And this one, Jerry, a month later."

"Will Marza, the mother of Stephanie Marsh, please communicate with Stephen Marsh, Senior. She will learn facts of the greatest importance to herself and her child."

"Jerry—they ran that in the Sunday papers for months and months."

Jerry closed her eyes imagining the terror of discovery Marza must have suffered. Her friends may have seen that notice. May have twitted her.

"She never gave any answer, Stephanie?"

"No! She was in mortal fear they would find me and take me. She even feared they would kidnap me. I suppose you don't remember that she went to Chicago and stayed for months when that notice was running? It was just after Stephen was killed. She came and lived at the convent with me."

"How did they ever learn of you? And of her?"

"Marza isn't sure. But my father had a set of these medallions. My name and the date of my birth were written on the back of mine. And some love message on the back of hers. That's how they got her first name. It's all they seem to know. Marza thinks that Stephen left these medallions with some of her letters in a safe deposit box when he came West for that last visit. He may have left some notice of my existence . . . may have made some will asking that I be cared for in case

Marza also died. I don't know. Anyway—they found out.

"Here—look—this is the best of them! It's only three years back. And they're right near us!

"You see, they knew Stephen came to California. And perhaps some of Marza's letters were dated from here. Anyway, they seem to have looked mostly in the West."

The notice read:

"Will Stephanie Marsh, daughter of Marza and Stephen Marsh, Junior, please communicate with Stephen Marsh, Senior, Van Orden building, Los Angeles? She will learn facts immensely to her advantage.

"Any person knowing the whereabouts of Stephanie Marsh and furnishing correct information will be liberally recompensed."

"Jerry—think what it MIGHT mean! Shall I answer? Shall we go traveling down there and collect the million!"

The two girls faced each other and laughed: "We could surely use that million, Jerry!"

"Yes, if he has it and would like to give it to you."

"Why else should they be advertising for me? Surely not in mere idle curiosity. Of course, they've an estate and want it to come to the rightful heir."

"But he may have willed it off in these three years. Or your grandmother may have died and he, most likely, has married the housekeeper—a way old men have. What chance have you with her five cross-eyed brats?"

"You're against him, then? And you'd let the whole thing lie as it has for fourteen and a half years?"

"At nineteen one is usually seeking ways to ditch the family. It might prove very risky acquiring one. You don't know what kind of a domineering old tyrant he may be. Perhaps he has gout or delirium tremens and you'd be kept busy putting cold cloths on his head of nights. A son isn't always proof of his father.

"Or he may be some peculiar crank person egotistical enough to be curious about his progeny. He may be just grubbing along, a conceited, fat-headed ole bore wondering what kind

of seed he planted and what sort of weed or flower grew. You don't want him minus the million, do you?"

"I should say not. One poor relation to a family is enough.

"On the other hand," she proceeded airily, determined to have the kind of grandfather she fancied, "he's probably very distinguished looking—a gallant and cultured gentleman with a gold-headed cane and a flower on his coat. He's most likely invested heaps of money in oil.

"People who move to Los Angeles late in life do. He may own half of Signal Hill and all I need is to drop a postal card and he'll come flying up here in a magnificent French car. Gosh—he could probably make me a star in the movies should I so desire to twinkle!"

Stephanie turned with a bubbling laugh: "Jerry, I'm sure he has a huge heart full of kindness—and a huge pocket full of coin. He must have been wild to find me. He probably thought of Stephen's child left alone in the world: farmed out like the kids in 'Sparrows.' Maybe he even fancied me starved and abused. And he didn't want that. Such a pretty little thing! Cute picture, isn't it?

"I could drop him a vague line, signing your name and saying that I once knew a girl in a convent named Stephanie Marsh, then I'd sound him out and perhaps even look him over before accepting him.

"Something tells me we should do it, Jerry!"

"Something often tells a person wrong. It's your own wish, Stephanie, and not any prophetic instinct that gives you those whispers."

"Then you wouldn't? You'd pass the whole thing up?"

"Well, we're all right, the three of us. And we'll get by and have gay scarlet times. We always have. If Marza hid you for fourteen years, Stephanie, SOMETHING as reliable as your SOMETHING must have told her to. It worked out."

Said Stephanie, holding the yellow clippings before her: "But it's vastly haunting having this mysterious relative hovering about.

"And I've just about spent the money. We need that, Jerry. A whole year more before I can take a job. I'm making it awfully hard for you."

"Best thing that ever happened to me, Steve! Aren't you happy enuf as is without a million?"

Stephanie gave an infectious laugh. She was exultant, greedily absorbing gaiety and cynicism: flippancy and philosophy: responding eagerly to the whole vagabond atmosphere.

In the afternoons Sylvia dropped in. Times were slack for her, so she decided to paint Stephanie's portrait. To the unbounded delight of the model.

And Heinie came. He brought books and candy and every beguiling toy he could find. Often Jerry would find him sitting at Stephanie's feet: would see his fine, earnest eyes lighted with gladness as Stephanie ran her hand through his disorderly hair and told him merrily: "What a comfort of a borrowed lover you've turned out to be! I wonder if my own, if I should ever acquire one, will be half as satisfactory and delightful?"

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"Happy?" she now mused, "am I! We'll let my grandfather R.I.P. if you know what that means. I wouldn't give up one evening here for whole eternities elsewhere. No wonder Jerry, you've such an exotic fragrance living like this all your life. No wonder you and Marza have such lots of 'it.' Jerry is it all off between you and Saxon?"

"Yes," said Jerry, surprised at the flat, quiet word voicing so thundering a lie. "It's all off!"

"You didn't grieve at all, did you?"

"Nor take to my bed and die a la Camille! It's not being done today, Steve! Only females of the 100 per cent mid-Victorian variety—little ladies made of sugar and spice and everything nice and imagining themselves and their woes of world importance go into mourning for a vanished love.

"You've got to be sheer, unmitigated woman stuff—egotistic, devoid of humor and perspective before you can take to a dark corner and weep because of a busted heart. What is a heart but a hunk of tissue, anyway?

"Steve," she went on, blocking the chance of interruption, "tragedy is leaving the world. It's following God and religion out of existence. The more we realize our own unimportance the farther heaven vanishes and the less demand for a hell.

"We've rationalized the remorse out of sinning: we've sex hygiened the romance out of love. And our ultimate achievement will be a world destitute of drama: a world where nothing matters: where triangles are tolerated and wailing wives obsolete.

"Make the most of tears while you may!"

Stephanie regarded her with bright, solemn eyes: "You didn't love him! You'd be one vast, suffering ache for all your philosophy if you did! Could all the cold reason in the world have soothed Marza's pain? Could you rationalize the tragedy out of Stephen's death?

"Jerry—you didn't love him!" Stephanie had her small hand tangled in the topknot of Jerry's hair.

"What do you know of love, Stephanie?" said Jerry suddenly and flinging her head back to catch the look in her sister's eyes.

"Oh," said Stephanie turning crimson, "I think much of it. I've many theories. I wonder why a girl cares for one man and doesn't care for another who would make her vastly happy."

"You wonder why I don't love Heinie?"

"I can hardly believe that you don't, Jerry."

"Well, I've a deep affection for him. I've known him eighty years."

Bringing it out slowly—warmly: "Have you ever kissed him, Jerry?"

"About 767 times, more or less."

"I suppose you pet?"

"Do you? Not with Heinie, though."

"Don't you call kissing a mode of petting?"

"Not the kind of kisses I gave Heinie."

"Why don't you love him? Do you like Hugh better?"

"You mean would I marry Hugh before I would marry Heinie? Yes, I would. I love Heinie—you know the old

stuff—like a sister." She thought gaily, and reaching up to give Stephanie's hand a tug and to put it back in her hair. She liked to have anyone pull her hair—she thought: "Now, ole dear, go to it and dream of him and woo him! The coast is clear for all of me!"

* * * * * * *

The days passed as she had visioned them—work filling her days. Quiet or Hugh entertaining her nights.

"You're dogging it, aren't you?" Sylvia accused.

"You were mistaken about that—about her backing him. I went and found out. I went directly and asked him. He told me he had money enough of his own."

"Well, it would be like her to boast! That doesn't make her any the less worthless for him . . . a worthless, faking parasite!"

"You know the old platitude, Sylvia—one thing you never get by demanding and one thing you never keep by chaining is love. If Mary Eunice can hold him, she can. My hat's not in the ring for him!"

But as the summer passed and Mary Eunice continued her sway and as he quietly took for granted Jerry's acceptance of a calm, middle-aged friendship, she grew inwardly, burningly desperate.

One night she had a chance to test out Mary's hold—to see for herself ruthlessly, convincingly, Mary's power.

She should have ceased hoping after that. Only that she was twenty-three—only that she was so much the woman.

CHAPTER XXXV

August again with the tawny fire of Indian Summer in the twilight pageant of the hills. Jerry, in a still excitement, plucked dead leaves from the primroses. Pretty, the way each delicate blossom is held in its little green cup.

A year ago they bloomed and faded just like this. And a year ago one Sunday Jerry stood here at Marza's porch garden, waiting with jangling nerves for a telephone to ring.

That was the time, her mind told her quietly, without evasion, they had reached the parting. And she waited for him to come: with the sweep of his arms and the touch of his lips annihilate the bitter fact.

A whole year since that house party at Phil Cowper's country place.

Tonight Phil was giving a dinner. It would be different from dinners at the weekends—quite different. Yvonne Potter, Phil's bride, would adroitly see to this.

All that last summer Yvonne had graciously and with a large smile attended those weekends. She tuned her tolerance so well that Phil eagerly and believing himself the courtier plunged into marriage.

Then Yvonne began to tighten the reins. They got off to a bad start with a wedding where even Sylvia, so they said, became mildly lit. But the wet summer was followed by a very dry winter, as Phil sheepishly told Inga.

Yvonne scratched various bootleggers from her 6 o'clock calling list. She relegated Ora Pringle, Jessie Reinach, Bud Malone and half a dozen other ladies and gentlemen of easy acquiescence to a bowing distance. The reforming of Phil went ahead femininely and triumphantly.

Yvonne spent Phil's income, compelled him to earn more,

and saved him from the ruin his ill-timed legacy had started. He was happy.

* * * * * * *

Jerry was going to this dinner. She began to dress. "It's lucky Marza and I can wear the same clothes," she thought, slipping the crimson sequins over her head. "Wardrobes getting tacky. And I'm glad I look flashy in red!"

She observed with quickened pulse the shadowy purple fire in her eyes, the reckless taunt of her young, passionate mouth. Just how she wanted to look—high and go-to-the-devil-you!

Just how she wanted Saxon Rhodes to see her—always. "Why do I feel so? Why do I want him to think I don't give a damn?"

He would be there tonight. With Mary.

And it was bitterly important that Jerry should appear beautiful—taunting, indifferent, supreme. She smiled with faint contempt: "The woman of it, Cleopatra! We can't get away from it, can we?"

* * * * * * *

Mary Eunice wore emerald green. The color suited her shadowed eyes, her soft brown hair and skin, the texture of pale tan satin. She looked willowy and attractive sitting there on the divan with her legs swung back half under her, her head lowered. Saxon spoke to her. A warm, meditative smile parted her lips. But she kept her eyes down and flushed. It was very maidenly and appealing.

And he liked it and gazed at her warmly.

Jerry saw this as she entered the room. The divan was nearest to her. Mary immediately made room and began talking in the most comradely way, clasping her hand in Jerry's.

"I was just telling Saxon what a clever thing you are, Jerry, but he seems to know it. I keep forgetting that you two are old friends.

"Still, he's not seen my purple room. You know, Sacks, I wanted it in black, but Jerry was afraid that would remind me of death and keep me pure like a nun. She insisted that I

be saved from such a fate, and did it in purple. Wasn't that cunning in her?"

A touch of patronage in Mary's friendliness. It made Jerry burn—this kindness of the victor to the displaced favorite.

"You know, Jerry," went on the rather obtuse Miss Pennings, "I wish you'd come down to Pebble Beach some week-end and help us decide on the details of the manor house. Join us, won't you?"

"All right," said Jerry, wickedly. "I'll have Sacks run me down any time you're inclined, Mary!"

She glanced into Saxon's eyes and gave him an appraising, faintly derisive smile. He was very uncomfortable.

Yet she knew that he was thinking Mary Eunice very sporty while she, Jerry, was unbending and subtly cat-like.

After dinner she gained a second flash. They were waiting for Yvonne to give them places at the card tables.

Mary Eunice was holding forth in husky, earnest tones on the immortality of the soul. It was one of her qualities to talk authoritatively on any profound subject.

She leaned forward, apparently unconscious of herself, but luring the two men with her warm eyes and sensuous voice. In her fervor she clasped one hand to her heart. And kept it there. The gesture was appealing, especially with those parted lips and soul-awakened eyes. But it embarrassed Jerry. She knew Mary Eunice was perfectly selfaware—a woman always is—and she felt like snapping: "Oh, put your hands in your lap. He's not likely to forget you're a woman and have curves! Besides, you've no more nor less than any barmaid! Why make a point of it!"

The amazing thing was that both Saxon and Hugh were tricked.

"No," said Mary Eunice with cute cynicism, "I see no reason why the hereafter should be crowded with millions of defunct humans any more than it should be crowded with defunct cows or pigs.

"But I do think Spinoza is right in claiming an immortality for the universe. We share in this.

"Our bodies are cells in the body of the race, our race is an incident in the drama of life: our minds are fitful flashes of an eternal light."

"Oh," said Hugh, "you've phrased that beautifully!"

Mary gave him a flushed smile and accepted the tribute. Saxon's eyes meeting Jerry's lit with triumph as though he said: "Now you see for yourself she's brilliant!"

They rose, following Phil's wife to the card tables.

Jerry and Hugh and three or four others were not playing.

"I had no idea Miss Pennings was such a thinker," said Hugh, "I've not heard so neat a phrasing in a long time."

Jerry gave him an angry look but said nothing. She didn't care what Hugh thought of Mary Pennings.

Yvonne brought high-balls to the card tables. They were playing a cent-point. Very silent and intent. Playing bridge as men plot the fate of nations: sipping high-balls: keeping scores.

At midnight they were still playing: and at one o'clock.

"You don't mind if we stay another rubber, do you?" said Mary Eunice.

Saxon looking haggard and slightly flushed drained his glass. "No—stick it out if you wish."

"They'll play till morning," said Yvonne, bidding Jerry goodby. "You can't pry Mary Eunice loose from a bridge game. She'd think you impudent if you interrupted her to take a hot coal off your foot."

"Well—that's all right for those who breakfast in bed at 11:30," said Jerry. "Men and working ladies should know better."

She thought with fury and bitterness: "He must be sunk in her hopelessly if he lets her cheat him from a day's work. How can he be fresh tomorrow! He lets her cheat him of that!"

Two days later Saxon dropped in for a brief late afternoon visit.

CHAPTER XXXVI

JERRY was very busy doing panels for a fall fashion show. For the space of two minutes after Saxon's entrance she kept on with her sketching. Then she asked abruptly "How are the Melhurst plans getting along?"

"Not too quickly. I've been crowded with other work."

"You'll surely finish them in time, won't you?"

"Of course." He was reluctant to talk of this.

She sensed his impatience and thought craftily: "You've come in to talk of *her,* haven't you? To tell me how fine and how fair she is! Go to it!"

"Jerry—you looked beautiful the other night."

"I wished you to think so, ole dear. Sweet for remembrance."

Quickly and with resentment: "I don't understand how you can be so flippant about it! As though you never cared. As though I don't mean a thing to you."

"After all," she now turned about and, resting her elbows on the table behind her, smoked lazily: "After all, Saxon, why should I exult in the beauty I may have? It's not a personal achievement. It's a mere matter of luck and chromosomes. One cell different and I might have had squint eyes or a fish mouth.

"I wonder why women get conceited over their looks, as though they carved the phiz themselves.

"And I wonder why they play on their sex. Why they behave as though they had some unique possession in warm eyes, soft lips and the rest of the female paraphernalia. When seventeen million other women are formed in exactly the same pattern, is there any reason to get excited over my particular pair of arms and legs?"

"Eliminate beauty and sex, Jerry, and what have you left of color and joy on the earth? Every worthwhile thought and feeling we have is inspired by the one and tinged by the other. You'd reduce the world to a chill, colorless waste."

"No. I'd give you a world with a deeper beauty than the desire of the eyes. The optic nerve gets weary even gazing at loveliness. Paris got fed up on Helen's face.

"And as for sex, I'm not objecting to the honest passion one being who loves feels for the other.

"I mean all the hotsy-totsy that fills the magazines and novels today—the trumped-up stuff—the stuff that makes a woman ogle and say cute things, and lean her weight on a man when she dances with him. All that hokum. All this cultivated S. A. that every kid from fourteen upward is acquiring. It's so damn silly and such an insult to the intelligence of men.

"Of course, the men like it and fall for it. But the next generation won't. When the flashy little flapper of today is forty, the flappers of 1950 will sneer: 'Oh, be yourself and cut the sexy silliness! We've all got flesh!' And they'll pity her and her intriguing lures and her pockets full of pash as we pity the woman who weeps and goes about declaring she sacrificed herself for her children.

"They'll be honester and cleaner and won't understand why we've made all this to-do and commotion about the appeasing of a commonplace human hunger."

He regarded her—fascinated and amused. "Thus with a wave of your hand, Jerry, you banish the great and subtle game of the sexes. Aren't you a little unkind to the lads and ladies of 1950?"

She thought excitedly: "Why am I saying all this? Why is my throat so dry? He doesn't guess that I'm insane with jealousy! Doesn't guess that I'm slamming her—exposing her."

She answered in low, even tones: "In 1950 they'll have other pastimes. They'll be on the road to a deeper and more enduring relation of the sexes—a companionship in sport or

work or something. The kind of palship two fellows who lay in the same shell-shot trench have for each other.

"Or the kind of mutual delight two people would have who rushed together into a burning building and rescued nineteen orphans from death.

"We're overdoing S. A. so heavily that it's fast becoming a drug on the market. Everybody's got 'IT' or a counterfeit. And there's no longer the slightest mystery as to the where and how of a woman's lure. If every one took to writing Hamlets, how long would Shapespeare last?

"Well, everyone is taking to sexation. Our children, to escape the utter boredom of it, will be forced to invent new sins."

"You're a frightfully restless and critical person, Jerry."

"No—just plain greedy. I want joys deeper than bootleg scotch can furnish: thrills wilder than sofa-sheik stuff can produce.

"I want more than life gives, it seems. As Shaemus O'Sheel puts it:

" 'This is the doom of those whose desire is unbounded,
To feel in the dark
The wall insurmountable,
To hear beyond hearing the song that shall never be heard.
To see beyond seeing the picture that shall not be painted:
To sense forever
In wind and water
In wood and meadow,
In city and solitude,
More than the heart can hold or the mind encompass.
This is our doom, we weavers of Time's pale garlands.
To seek forever and find not the Rood and the Rose.
The Lips and the Grail that beckon us in our dreams.'

"A bitter doom, ole dear! But the dream is worth the seeking even though we know it shall never be found."

She seemed wooing that dream with her flame-lit eyes and lips redolent of songs.

And he, watching her, felt a stirring, an uneasiness, a wanting. As when one watches a star shooting in lonely splendor from sight.

He said a little flatly, "Even today there are girls who are wearied of surface pleasures . . . girls seeking a deeper meaning to life."

She closed her eyes and nodded, smiling—"One or two!"

She thought hotly, pityingly: You think Mary Eunice is one of them! Ah, yes—interested in immortality, isn't she?

He was now standing at her side, looking at her sketch. "How are you getting along with Briers?"

"Finished it yesterday. Looks darby."

Hesitantly, feeling his way and stealthily regarding her profile: "You're almost finished with Mary's place? She's immensely pleased."

"It would have been finished ages ago but she keeps changing her mind. She finally decided she wanted hand-tufts from Spain. They take months. When will the Monterey manor-house be ready?"

"It's not started yet. She's changed plans on that, too. She doesn't know much of architecture or art, though she's so cultured in other lines. It makes her uncertain of her taste and quite fickle. But she's very pleasant to work with. Don't you find her so?"

"Yes—she's not interfered with me. And that's always a comfort."

"Money hasn't spoiled her, that's all. She's attractive, don't you think?"

"Very appealing. She's also lucky, isn't she? I heard she won $125 the other night after we left. I hope you didn't lose it, Saxon. The old adage—the rich get richer and the poor get poorer!"

"I lost $17—that's all. Mary plays a wonderful game. It's not luck but good head-work that wins for her. She's really brilliant in many ways. Wasn't that a clever thing she said the other night about sharing the immortality of the universe?"

"It was," answered Jerry in matter-of-fact tones. "He has

many things like that—lighted arrows driving with fire into your thoughts."

"Who are you talking about?"

"The man she quoted—Will Durant in the 'Story of Philosophy.'"

Saxon gave her a blank look.

She went on amiably: "It's that part where he comments on Spinoza's religion."

"I've not read the book. I didn't know she was quoting."

"Oh, didn't you?" She turned abruptly in a whirlwind of emotion and began clearing up her table. Furious, angry words came blazing to her tongue. She found it hard to stem them. She longed to shout. . . .

"You didn't know she was quoting? Did you know she kept you up till four g.m. and robbed you of the next day's fervor! Do you know she's a selfish pig who doesn't give a damn if your work goes to pot so long as she has her rubber of bridge! Lord, you poor baby, you don't know enough to come in out of the rain, do you? Someone ought to fetch you!"

She was pale and excited with the necessity of silence.

He said, rather startled at this sudden frenzy of action, "Why do you have to clean house when I come in for a ten-minute visit?"

"In three weeks from today I'll tell you why! I'll tell you exactly why!"

The wild statement proved a prophecy.

CHAPTER XXXVII

An hour after Saxon left, Jerry remained sketching. She worked with intent, exhausting fury. That was one beauty of anger—it got her brain excited; made all the cells blaze up. She finished the panel; felt grimly pleased and exceedingly tired.

Then she remembered that Marza would be out. Stephanie was alone and waiting for her to come. Perhaps getting dinner and over straining herself. "Hell and damnation," she thought irritably, "I wish he'd keep out of this shop."

Coming into the apartment, she was delighted to hear Inga holding forth. Inga and Sylvia had dirt to rake, so had taken it into their heads to come down and get dinner. A nice habit they had.

"Well, another good man gone wrong," said Inga, eating the peas as quickly as she shelled them.

"Meaning what and who?"

"Rod Porter has run off with Nellie Spear, the darling of Paris, and allowed her to marry him. Think of that stunning Belvidere place overrun by the likes of Nellie Spear!"

"I've made biscuits. They'll be ready in ten minutes. Let the green peas go," said Sylvia coming from the kitchen and wiping floury arms on her apron.

"What I wish someone would answer," she went on, winging debonairly from the kitchen to the clouds, "is this—how is it that men, claiming the higher intelligence, are yet so easily snared even by stupid women—even by saw-dust dolls."

"Centuries of scheming on the part of the weaker wits has developed the go-get-him-and-keep-him-instinct, ole dear. That's your answer," said Inga infallibly.

"For centuries, each individual woman of us has been pitted

against all other women in the fight for the male. Not only to nab him but to hold him as an exclusive possession—a necessary monopoly if we and our children would survive. Each other woman is a possible enemy—a possible homebreaker.

"Can't you just feature the first cavewoman lying awake nights and aware of the very alluring debutante growing up in the neighboring cave? Aware of the omnipresent menace to her home and her brood?

"How she must have dug a hairy chin into a hairy hand and cogitated long into the dawn on the ways and means of browbeating, without his guessing it, the precious and slumbering brute at her side. How she must have plotted to outshine the coy and tender Miss in the next-door dug-out.

"To keep the very hide on her body she was forced to foresee and outwit; to be alert and sniffing the danger always.

"It's this craft, developed through 10,000 years in the midnight moodings of women and woven into the very instincts of all girl babies but you, Sylvia, that enables even a stupid woman to hoodwink the superior but unaware male. That enables the Nellie Spears of the world to marry the Rod Porters."

"But we're giving all the time-honored secrets away. Take comfort in this, Sylvia," fired Jerry, still warm with her recent encounter. "We're overdoing the siren stuff so heavily that even the deaf, dumb and blind males are getting wise to us. They know they're being baited wantonly, deliberately. And before very long, they'll cease to bite.

"Woman has just about reached the end of the use-your-sex-to-land-him cycle. In another generation the female gender will have to find new and deeper lures or go unmarried to the grave.

"The kids of tomorrow will be as unlikely to marry because of mere sex attraction as to marry because both like tomatoes. An unnecessary and absurd reason for a life relationship. One can eat tomatoes without marrying.

"That's one good thing that's coming of petting and such. The sweet young things know beforehand just how much to

expect from sex. They're not likely to rush into marriage in the fool trust that physical delights will guarantee the happy ever after. They'll know better than to base a life union on so commonplace and passing an interest.

"So there's hope for the couples of the future. They will make marriages that will stick, because, as you say, Inga, they won't be one-cylinder affairs. The man and the girl of tomorrow will go into it open-eyed: they'll ask more from each other and give more than the random thrills of the senses."

"Oh, shades of Madame du Pompadour, grin down at this!" mocked Inga. "Those random thrills were good enough for you. Worth the guillotine, ole dear, weren't they? Yesterday, today and tomorrow!

"Or perhaps, Jerry, your kids of tomorrow will know better than to get wet when they fall in the water, or hot when they sit by a fire? Shall they be enlightened enough to imbibe nourishment from the air and save us the necessity of cooking? That's also an overdone craft.

"As long as HE continues to make them male and female the little old game begun by Eve in the garden will go on. Unless you were counting on three sexes, as old Professor Woodworth used to promise. And only a few—a very, very few, shall be born women with the feminine hunger to be loved and everlastingly cherished. The rest shall be drones and workers. I'm glad I came in time!"

"And I'm sorry I'm a bit early for your world, Jerry," said Sylvia, drawing her sharp black brows together in a droll squint. "But I think you're right. Inga, as is her way, lost your point. Sex attraction will, of course, continue to operate. But it won't be the prime foundation of marriage, as it is today. This marriage is certainly passing. No one who reads the vital statistics can deny it. Two divorces for each wedding! Two divorcees against each maid as she angles for her man.

"Yet we long for companionship. And when put to it as we now are, we'll find some better reason for picking a lifelong

partner than his curly lashes or his cute dimple. The biscuits are burning!"

Stephanie listened, shiny-eyed, silent—drinking up wisdom avidly. When Inga and Sylvia were gone, she sat at a desk writing. She was a forthright and matter-of-fact young person. Each Tuesday and Friday evening she wrote letters to the sisters in the convent.

Each Sunday morning she got up half an hour earlier than Jerry and with suspense-filled heart read the personal columns in the papers . . . expecting another message from the father of her father.

She was now writing her letters. Jerry was curious about these long messages written to holy women shut off in a convent. And amazed at the naïve candor with which Stephanie reported whole conversations: gave detailed descriptions of all the attractive men she met and even discussed the pros and cons of petting with this Sister Rose.

"She looks so unearthly, I don't see how you have the nerve."

"She's not unearthly, and then she raised me since I was four. For fifteen years she was the closest friend I had. After Marza left in those early summers, Sister Rose used to come and sing me to sleep. She was an angel to me—always."

"And she cried like anybody at the train when we took you away. After all, that's a sweet way to solve life, isn't it? Shut yourself off from it . . . a sweet, serene way. If I had it to do over again, Steve, I believe I would pray for a vocation."

"They're an awful problem—these men—aren't they? And it's too bad, girls like Sylvia are living too soon. They'll be the radiant catches in that next-generation world of yours, Jerry. The real mates for men."

Stephanie put down her pen and began walking haltingly about the room. She exulted in her steps as though each one were a triumph. She now turned, eyes laughing, and shook the rich, raggy hair from her forehead:

"Just the same, I hope I'm one who fits in, don't you, Jerry?

I want to fit into the world as it is, not as in some golden tomorrow we hope it's going to be.

"Do you think I walk nicely?"

"Yes—well enough to walk your way into any male thing's heart."

"Any one at all? Even the one I might choose?"

"Yes—his!"

"You're a vast comfort to a person, Jerry. Did Marza say anything to you about a celebration? At Del Monte? In honor of me and my recovered pins? I've never been on one of these wild weekends. Just think of it—twenty and never been tite! Marza's to arrange it."

"Beautiful but how?" thought Jerry, counting up the cost. For three months—ever since the opening of the new hotel, she had been on fire for just such a trip.

"We can't make it," she said definitely, waiting up that night for Marza:

"We're going to make it. There's $500 left unspent from the mortgage. All the bills are paid. And," said Marza with her balmiest air, "we'll invest the residue in our souls—the only proper place to invest money if you care about vital returns."

The weekend was, oddly enough, the turning point in Jerry's career.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

"TONIGHT life begins!" Stephanie gazed in the mirror, frankly enchanted by her winsome image. That evening dress of jade—the first real evening thing she had ever had—that beautiful lone pearl of Marza's glimmering at her throat, and, oh, the thrilling expectance in her heart. She would dance with him tonight. They would saunter out through the dreaming, poetic gardens. And perhaps—

Four years ago before just such a mirror Jerry had dressed, whispering to herself in the same humming fervor: "Is this love? Yes—yes! Does it come so quickly? Yes—yes!"

And had gone down to dance with Heinie; to keep peeking over Heinie's elbow for a glimpse of the tanned face and mirthful, thrilling eyes that were to become the beauty of the world to her.

She laughed at her sister and gave a twirl to Stephanie's hair: "Up this way—careless like. Now we're ready for the grand crash. You wait. I'll see if they've come."

She stole down through the corridors, wanting the twilight view alone. From every window of the new buildings were vistas—supremely lovely vistas as though in the distance magnificent paintings were hung.

Here, the many courts of flowers, royal now with dahlias and chrysanthemums. And there, from that arch, a view to haunt the heart—lofty trees framing gossamer ships on the blue, distant bay.

She walked sharply, carefully noting details of the interior decoration and ignoring the warm, inner excitement possessing her.

Daring—that orange colored pillow on the green sofa with the black, red and gold of those drapes. Daring yet harmoni-

ous. No little soul would have attempted that. And the delightful bamboo trees in the immense green pots giving such a summer garden look to the halls. She would make note of that tall, bright plant and use it one of these days.

The homely old cupolaed hotel that she remembered in her childhood, where she had come with the radiant young Marza and the dying George King—this old Del Monte was gone. And with it the homeliness, the intimate, half cloistered hush of halls and lobbies.

But in its place was the beautiful simplicity of column and Spanish court rising and melting so magically in the setting.

Six o'clock of this Friday evening, toward the end of September, the meadow lake rippling with gold, Jerry started down the leafy path.

In spite of her fiery young resolution, memories swept upon her. Just about here she had stood when she flung that first audacious kiss to Saxon Rhodes.

She hurried, coming to an abrupt pause. Footsteps overtaking hers, Heinie.

"I was waiting for you," said Jerry breathlessly and coloring. "We're all ready. Stephanie's beside herself. She's never been on such a celebration before."

Heinie's face eager. "Was the trip hard on her? I'm sure I could have driven as carefully as the train."

"She got by very well. Marza made her lie down since noon. And she's wild as a colt now. And excited beyond words with the thought of dancing again. She can try out a few steps just once and the once is going to be YOU, Heinie."

Jerry watched poignantly for an answering gleam in Heinie's eyes. He took her arm, regarding her happily. How durable, how easy and companionable Heinie had grown; the strength of maturity displacing his lanky homeliness.

"I'll try and do the courtly thing, Jerry. I've had a wonderful time playing with Stephanie. We're the very chummiest of chums. Do you know that? I've never felt so at home with a girl before. But then she's only a kid. I suppose that's why."

"Indeed, she's not a kid. You fancy that because she's been somewhat helpless. Why, Stephanie is twenty, Heinie—and a most self-sufficient young person. If she made you feel at ease, why that's because she has Marza's charm. And because Stephanie likes you very much."

He laughed: "I know she does! In some ways she's like you, Jerry. She reminds me of you. Perhaps that's why I've liked those visits. But she won't be needing me any more."

"Oh, she will! She can't go to work till next year. Marza isn't going to take the remotest chance. And now that Stephanie can go about a little, she'll need you more than ever. Why, you're her prime man-in-waiting, Heinie. You're not thinking of deserting us?"

"Yes," said he, quietly, and brushing a hand slowly through his hair. "I want to get away. As long as there's no use in my sticking around. There isn't, is there? I wouldn't even be a second choice, would I, Jerry?"

"I'm not going to marry, Heinie. I don't like the prospect of spinsterhood, I quite assure you. But I seem to be the kind of person who doesn't take second choices."

"But, even if you did, the second choice would not be I. It would be Hugh?"

She answered slowly and feeling a load on her heart: "I've grown infinitely fond of you, Heinie. I like walking here with you now. I like talking to you. I'd rather trust Stephanie with you than with anyone else in the world. And I'll miss you bitterly. But as for marriage—you're right. I was never further from it with anyone than I am tonight.

"Where will you go, and when?"

"My father is opening a branch bonding house in Seattle. I've a choice of taking it over till it gets started. And now I want to get away."

She said, trembling: "Don't tell Stephanie. Not for a while, Heinie. It would quite spoil her wild celebration."

And she thought as they sauntered back to the hotel—she thought, hotly, and with stinging eyes: "Lord—Stephanie, too! It's like a fate! Marza—I—Stephanie."

When they came into the lobby Marza and Robert Caples, Hugh Hammond and Stephanie were waiting.

Stephanie came forward, both hands eagerly reaching for Heinie's. She came laughing and with an elfin grace, the red-brown hair in a ragged wave over her forehead.

She glanced with merry eyes in Heinie's. These showed plainly their amazed delight.

"Do I look that good?" she asked gleefully. "I thought so myself."

And later, when Stephanie glided into his arms, throwing to them a joyous, backward glance, Jerry thought achingly, "Will he wake up? He should."

Marza sat quietly watching that slim, sweet young form. She said softly, "I was never quite so happy, pet!"

Happiest with the storm and anguish done? Is that the way of it? Jerry, drifting into a one-step with Hugh, hummed dreamily. Perhaps. But if one has to wait the years away —wait the fervors away—

"Jerry, dear—whom are you dancing with?" asked Hugh with a humorous twinkle.

"With myself at the age of forty, Hugh. I'm thinking how placid and comfortable to be forty and done with tumults."

"Why not eighty and done with even the placidity? I should be flattered to know that I caused the least of your tumults."

"And I should be wiser if you did, Hugh."

"Jerry, what about that theory of yours? If one should marry because of many mutual interests and because of deep happiness in each other's company; if one should relegate the mere wild youth of it to the background, then why not you and I? You should be game to try out your own philosophies.

"Do you not think we might prove the one ideally mated couple on the earth and a shining example to all other harried souls?"

Hugh's thin, blonde face flushed. Though his lips laughed his eyes met hers with a deep, pleading sweetness.

She was about to answer lightly, when out of the dancing

crowd a face confronted hers. The next moment Mary Eunice Pennings greeted them.

"How jovial this is," said Mary intimately. "I'm a lone soul until tomorrow. So I'll tag along with you. We'll have the gayest time tomorrow—all of us. Rod and bride Nellie are coming for the weekend. Did you know that? Saxon, too."

Saxon, too. Coming down here to repeat to Mary Eunice words said four years ago to Jerry.

CHAPTER XXXIX

At midnight Jerry came softly into their room. She thought Stephanie must surely be asleep.

A murmured laugh at the window. Stephanie, pale and trembling: "Oh, isn't it wonderful down there with the moonlight on the dahlias? I'd like to stand here forever—looking and looking."

"And feeling and feeling," thought Jerry, pressing her forehead against the pane. "You'd like to pass out of the picture in this dream tide of feeling, wouldn't you, Steve? How lovely that would be."

"Was it all as sweet as you hoped, Stephanie?"

"A thousand times sweeter!" A long, happy moment Stephanie stood before the mirror regarding the shimmering green dress. Then reluctantly pulled it over her head. Muffled in this, she said gaily: "It's awfully sporty in you, Jerry, to loan me your lovers. Not many sisters would! Doesn't he dance exquisitely? Doesn't he say the gayest, happiest things!"

"I'll not let him go away," thought Jerry moodily, abruptly remembering Heinie's decision. "Someone in this family is going to get what she wants!"

All the next morning, insistent and anxious came the whisper to her ears: "I wonder if Saxon's got here yet? I wonder if he knows I'm here!"

At four o'clock she was suddenly laughing: suddenly silly with relief. She was grabbing little Nellie Spears and bowling her over with the warmth of her greeting. For Saxon wasn't coming! He had work to do and couldn't make it. Mary Eunice took the note Rod brought—a brief note. Jerry had the satisfaction of knowing this.

Mary split the envelope, a sharp whiteness compressing her

lips. "Wonder when the work piled up, Rod? I can't say I like this!"

Thought Jerry with child-like glee: "Who cares! I like it. He'll never come down here and tell you that he loves you, Mary Pennings! I'll lay ten lives to that. He'll never come here to say it!"

Mary's disappointment found a rather shocking outlet.

They were sitting about after dinner, Heinie telling of a picturesque Spanish gambling joint deep in the Salinas hills.

A black old Don who was seventy-seven but sharp as a whip opened the door. If you passed his scrutiny you were ushered stealthily into a lighted room. Presently you were offered cigarettes and real old bourbon—all with ancient Spanish hospitality. Then you played roulette or shook dice and settled the score.

"I've got a way to beat roulette," said Heinie, taking out pencil and paper, "a system that never fails. I've worked it any number of times."

"I'm for it," said Mary, leaning over Heinie's shoulder. "I'm for the gambling joint tonight."

Heinie's system, which he stoutly declared was given him by a man who once broke the bank at Monte Carlo, consisted of choosing red or black: odd or even and betting on the same one of these every time.

You covered each loss with an increased bet. These increases were worked out according to a mathematical formula that at the end of a game left you fifteen points to the good.

Of course, you might lose a scandalous amount before your increased bets would recover for you, but in the end, if you had sufficient funds, you were bound to win.

"How much money do you need?" asked Mary, excited and taking a long draught of her high-ball.

"One night I was $500 behind," said Heinie slowly, enjoying their excitement. "I stayed with it and came out $300 to the good. I was betting a dollar a point. Half that is enough. You should have about $500. With that you can't lose."

"I'm with you, Heinie—$250 each—how about it?"

They figured and planned, going through imaginary games —now you lost seven times in succession, win three, lose again. At the finish of the game you were always those fifteen points ahead.

At 9 o'clock they were all climbing into Heinie's machine.

"This," said he, "is the place I've always wanted to take you, Jerry. One of the few adventures left in California. Old Spaniard is the greatest fellow. Tomorrow they'll have cock fights."

"Isn't $250 an immense amount to lose in one night, Heinie?"

"Why, we're not going to lose. Didn't I demonstrate that?"

"Of course!" said Mary. "You can't possibly lose as long as two plus two make four!"

It was very dark. The moon not up and the headlights of the machine cutting through massy, formidable shadows. They were in the labyrinth of shrubs now—nosing along. Miles like this—then a dim light—the sound of a guitar—a girl singing.

"The don's granddaughter," whispered Heinie. "We're here!"

A large plain room, fully lighted. Groups in evening dress sitting around the roulette wheels, small mountains of chips before them.

One young man excitedly marking down his bets, excitedly ordering the croupier not to touch his stacks. "I'll hand them. Don't touch them!"

"He's playing our system," Heinie murmured, grinning.

"And losing!" added Jerry. "He's almost having St. Vitus' dance over it."

"Give me the money," said Mary. "Let me play."

"You play—I'll keep count."

"No—I'll do it all—more luck."

"Are we half and half on it, Mary?"

"Half and half!"

They all heard that. And they all remembered it.

CHAPTER XL

MARY took her place at the table. She bought chips and stacked them nervously, twenty to a pile. She gripped the board and watched the agitated young man.

He was playing the black and losing, his bets increasing at an alarming rate—$76 on the turn of the wheel; $105, lose again; now $160 . . . lose that.

"Red's the thing," said Mary. "Here goes—a dollar a chip."

She laid her first bet, won, scratched off the top and bottom numbers of her progression; laid the second and the third: won both. The numbers in the formula were all used up.

"What now?" she asked stupefied.

"End of game one and we're fifteen dollars to the good," said Heinie. "Begin over."

Brisk, clean went the second and third game. Win, lose—win, lose, win twice, lose five times. Winning now—scratching off numbers.

The fourth game was interminable. The great mountain of chips dropping. Mary became nervous as the bets increased and with each loss a larger number added to the bottom of her column. She played $19—$23—$31.

"Are you sure it always comes out $15 to the good?" she whispered huskily to Heinie.

"Keep on! You can't lose. Watch the figures!"

They stood behind her—scarcely breathing. The young man playing the black became reckless and discarded the gradual progression. With each turn of the wheel he doubled his stakes.

He was winning: the red losing.

Reluctantly Mary played $37, lost it: $43, $57; lost both. Now $71.

"Ye gods," whispered Jerry through fevered lips. "You've lost about $290."

"That's all right. We've capital enough. Keep a-going, Mary. That's it—$105."

Mary's hand shoving the stack slowly, eyes burning.

"Remember," she said thickly "this is on your responsibility!"

"Play it!"

Mary leaned forward, not breathing. Watching the wheel.

"Thank God!" she gasped as the pointer came slowly to rest on the red.

The next bet was $117. She lost. The next was $160. She won: won seven times in succession, the man playing the black losing. He kept doubling.

As Mary scratched off her last two numbers, he laid $1,400 on the table. The red came up: Mary's game finished.

She shoveled in her chips, her cheeks blazing. She turned flushed, fascinated eyes to Heinie's: "Tough going for a while there. We were almost to the end of our pile."

He laughed. "Better quit. We're $60 to the good."

"Quit! Tomorrow morning, perhaps! This is better than bridge."

She sat tense, the score tablet beside her. "Sixty dollars! By morning we'll be $500 to the good!"

Midnight. The room gradually crowding. Men and women in dinner clothes thronging about the crap-table and the roulette. The names of celebrities whispered about. Over there a famous writer from Carmel, and there a millionaire from Pebble Beach.

The old Don moved about cordially: giving cryptic orders to a Chinese butler who bore his tray of liquor and cigarettes from room to room.

"Come on," whispered Heinie in Jerry's ear: "I'll show you the back rooms and the kitchen. The Don's granddaughter will offer you a homemade enchilada."

It was hot about the roulette table and a little tiresome.

Jerry followed Heinie down a narrow passage to a room screened off with a yellow curtain.

A pretty, black-eyed girl was sitting tailor-fashion on a small table. She smoked an extravagantly long cigarette. As Heinie entered, she jumped down and, pulling out a very wide pleated skirt, demurely dropped a curtsy.

"You like enchilada for the senorita?" she asked, taking the cover from an immense oven, when a rush of garlicky steam filled the room. "Verra good, aren't they, Senor Heinie? I make by myself each little part."

As she spoke she threw smiles and the flash of brilliant black eyes in Heinie's direction. She made love, saying these commonplace words.

"You sit here. See—how nice, a napkin for the senorita; none for Heinie!"

She ladled the redhot enchiladas to thick and greatly nicked plates. Then she went to a little cupboard and brought out two silver forks worn thin with age.

"For the Senor Heinie. No one else uses them—evverr! what is the senorita's name?" she asked naïvely.

"Dance a fandango and I'll tell you," said Heinie.

The girl gave an impish shrug to her shoulders. "No—I don't dance tonight!"

But she pushed her little table against theirs and seated herself upon it and launched into an amusing and startling tirade against the gamblers who won at her grandfather's games. The inhospitality of them coming here and drinking up old liquor and winning! Such poor breeding!

The enchilada was indeed worthy of her boasting.

"But I'll smell like garlic," said Jerry.

"No," said the girl. "You eat a little parsley. I eat them every day and no one ever objects to my kisses. The senor won't notice it."

They fooled away an hour.

The moment they returned to the large room: the moment Jerry glanced toward Mary's place at the table she knew something had happened.

Mary's face was ashen—her mouth a white, angry gash. Suddenly her voice rose—shrill, penetrant. "Black again!"

"Looks as though we're just in time," said Heinie.

They reached the table. Mary was sitting there rigid. She had suddenly ceased playing.

The moment she saw Heinie her eyes flared like an animal's. "The game's crooked!"

"No—it isn't!"

"It is! Thirteen times in succession the black came up."

"That's all right . . . play on!"

"There, look at it! Black again."

"Finish the game."

"On your responsibility?"

"Of course—finish it!"

Mary shoved $190 to the red . . . and lost. Lost again.

"Fifteen times in succession. It can't be straight!" Her hand loitered over the $213. With a sudden inspiration, she drew a line through her long column of figures, marked them out.

"Oh, my God! Don't do that!" said Heinie. "Play the game through."

But Mary had already begun a new succession—let the losing game go—starting again. . . .

"You can't do that . . . take it up where you left off." He pushed the $213 to the red. And then—then only perceived it was the end of her stack.

"How is this?" said he, mystified. The wheel stopped at the black.

"How is it!" said Mary, jumping from the table and sweeping her hand across the chips as the croupier drew them in. "They're crooked! And your system's a joke—that's how!"

The people at the table stared. The old Don rushed up.

"Let's get out!" said Heinie, greatly embarrassed.

Mary laughed: "All right with me. If it's all right with you!"

She settled in the back of the machine folding her arms furiously.

"You didn't play it right," said Heinie quietly. "You have to play each game through."

"Risk $213 on the turn of the wheel? Fifteen times in succession! Don't be insane. No one could do that."

"If you'd played the game through—"

Mary interrupted with a high, glittering laugh:

"I played the game through. On your responsibility! On your orders, and your $500. I should worry! Too bad for you."

CHAPTER XLI

In the unpleasant silence following Mary's announcement, five pairs of eyes turned on her indignantly.

"You've not had so much fun in a long time, Mary," said Rod Porter, trying to ease the situation. "Worth $250 of your money any day."

"Try and get it," sniffed Mary. "I don't need a system if I want to throw money in the street."

"You didn't play the system," said Heinie good naturedly and pretending to ignore Mary's threat. "How many times before that last, did you quite in the middle of a game and begin over?"

She answered this with an evasive: "How many times with a capital of $500 can you risk $213 on the turn of a wheel!"

"I told you to play half dollar a point, then the $500 would be sufficient."

"And said nothing when I raised it to a dollar a point."

"Oh, you were getting by, Mary. Only you got cold feet and quit playing your game through when the bets increased. That's way we lost out."

"We lost out when you ordered me to stake $190. I was for quitting then while we were still ahead.

"Jerry, you heard me tell him the game was crooked. You noticed that no one was playing the black? So they made the black come up. They cleaned that other idiot out first. He ended with his collar torn to ribbons and $4000 in the hole. All that time I was winning. But with him out they started to clean me.

"I was hundreds ahead when the black started coming up. Thirteen times was enough for me. I was for stopping. Jerry, you saw that I'd quit!

"I said emphatically that I was through! I'd had enough. We were just about even then.

"And you all heard Heinie order me to play on—finish the game. And you heard me tell him it would be on his responsibility entirely. He shoved that last $213 to the board over my protest. Jerry, you saw it!"

"Well—what about it, Mary?"

"Nothing about it! Nothing of any concern to me!"

"Oh, you started to play the game, Mary. It was 50-50, win or lose, wasn't it?"

"It was 50-50 and you CAN'T lose!"

She sat back in formidable silence.

"Don't say any more," Heinie urged, driving down the now faintly illumined road. Jerry and Hugh sat with him in the front seat. "She's unnerved and excited, and she drank too much of that old bourbon. It creeps up slowly. She'll be all right tomorrow. Let's forget it. The enchiladas were good, eh, Jerry?"

"But hardly worth $500 a pair, Heinie! I'd wring her neck before I'd let her get away with this. I'd sue her."

"I don't believe she means to get out of it. Let's give her a chance!"

Late Sunday morning a bluff and casual Mary joined them on the golf course.

She looked very trig in purple sweater and close-fitting hat pulled down to her shadowed eyes.

"Oh, whatta night," she yawned, giving them a superior smile and swinging along at Heinie's side. "And I had the filthy winnings all spent! You better lose that system, Heinie, before it loses your last dime. It's poison."

"She's not going to pay!" snapped Jerry, quickening her pace and ordering Hugh with a toss of her head to keep up with her. "She's going to pass it off balmily like that!"

Hugh, white with unbelief: "We'll insist that she pay!"

"How?"

"Explain that it was clearly understood by all of us—she was to furnish $250. Nothing was said about win or lose.

We were all witnesses. I feel personally liable to Heinie. Surely Miss Pennings won't risk our scorn for $250."

Jerry gave him a pitying stare and looked off over the rolling hills to a glimpse of the startling blue Monterery waters.

At four o'clock the Pennings' machine drove up to the hotel.

Mary with an arrogant: "Goodby, ole dears!" departed.

"And goodby to your $500, Heinie!" Jerry added.

Heinie refused to speak of the incident.

Upon her return to the city, the affair assumed titanic importance for Jerry.

She was in Sylvia's workroom looking over the half finished portrait of Stephanie.

"The kid got the thrill that comes but once in a lifetime, didn't she? I'm going to change the portrait. She's got a new look in her face—the wonder-look. Hope she keeps it."

"She had a beautiful time, but she had to stick rather close to the grounds. Couldn't take any long drives. Missed the show at the gambling joint."

Sylvia scraped paint from her palette. "Too bad Sacks wasn't there to see his lovely lady in action. Might have opened his eyes. They're going to be married."

"Rumor, Sylvia?"

"I got it from John. And you know how keen he is for gossip when it concerns Saxon Rhodes. The betrothal cards may be expected any day."

"As definite as that, Sylvia?"

"John thinks so."

Jerry turned white—whiter than a bone. "He'll not marry Mary Pennings," she murmured, tearing an envelope to merciless tatters. "I'll see to that!"

She went downstairs and closed the door of her room.

She got out paper and pen and began to write, driving the pen wildly. She wrote a brutal, scathing letter. At the end of the second page, she read back. And suddenly she pressed her hands to her face and began to sob.

She lost all control of her emotions and felt that she was gone mad. She had never sobbed like this in her life.

After a while, she was bathing her face and appraising herself with curious scorn. She went to her desk and tore up the letter slowly.

But her resolve remained unshaken. She would prevent Saxon Rhodes from marrying Mary Pennings. She would do this if it were within human power.

"I am really mad," she affirmed quietly, unable to keep that long line of faces—Saxon's face in a hundred different expressions—from passing and repassing in her mind.

She remembered the little-boy way he had come to her after that night in Belvidere when she had so bitterly denounced him. He had come in grinning and eager and sheepish—a hand full of jobs for her. And he said: "Don't you care for me any more, Jerry? You act as though you never loved me."

How humiliated and how deeply wounded when she answered that a woman loves a man only when she looks up to him. She could see the dark, hurt look of his eyes yet.

Suddenly it occurred to her that she had failed him as much as he failed her.

In all these months when he kept coming to see her: when he seemed so anxious that she should still think well of him, she had maintained that faintly derisive, impersonal manner. She had laughed and pushed him with gay ridicule, quietly, definitely, into Mary's arms.

Well—she thought that was the wise way. She thought that was the subtle thing.

No use to show scorn for Mary. A man always distrusts the honesty of the woman who is blackening another.

Unwittingly we give to that other the appeal of the persecuted: all the man in him rushes to the defense of the downtrod. We make him the ally of the woman we defame.

So she had not tried to rival Mary. She had waited. Too long.

"No—it's not too long! It's not too late. I'll go and see him tomorrow. Mary's betrothal cards will never be sent. That's that!"

Instead, Saxon came to Jerry.

CHAPTER XLII

"Of all the men on the face of the earth, why is it he and he only who makes the very air tingle for me? Why does he seem to fill the room with light?"

He came toward her, mirth in his eyes and that clean, sparkling look that made even his teeth seem extra-scrubbed. She regarded him excitedly.

"You look storm-tossed, Jerry. Why so?"

"A long, sad story, ole dear."

"And you're brown as the woods."

"A wild week in the sun with golf and swimming."

"And loving? I hear Hugh was down. He's extremely persistent, isn't he?"

"Are you curious about Hugh and me, Saxon?"

"Yes, I am. And I'd like to know if you took him out to that hill."

"Why the sentiment for a mere matter of geography?" Suddenly she laughed. "What queer hicks we are! I, too, wished that hill kept inviolate. And I had some wild moments when I feared you were coming down to lead my successor out there."

"I had no intention of going down for the weekend. Among other things I had too much work to do. Why don't you come in and let me show you my plans? I've been waiting for you to ask about them. Why would I lead anyone out to that hill?"

"A romantic spot to make the grand avowal. I hear the deed is done, Saxon. And I suppose I should offer congratulations."

"What did you hear?"

"That you and Mary are to be married."

He colored and clinched his jaws.

But she raced on, guessing that he would hedge if she gave him the chance: "Why the insane optimism, Sacks? Why are you throwing over the father of your country and going in for entangling alliances? It would be encouraging to learn why the blithe bachelor now seeks to become the bored benedict."

"If I marry," said he, drawing a harsh, labored breath, "there'll be no insane optimism about it. I won't go into it expecting ecstasy and lifelong happiness. That's past.

"If I go into it, it's because I'm sick of one-night stands. There's nothing much in the way of variety from one girl of this age to another. And I'm tired of repeating and playing around. And I know beforehand pertty nearly how any affair will turn out.

"If I marry now it won't be with any thrilled expectance. But because I want some stability to my life: some regularity.

"And as you once warned me when I seemed worth your while to get excited about—if I keep on the way I'm going, I'll be that paunch-bellied, bald-headed flat-tire you pictured me at the age of forty.

"The gay blade of the twenties has this depressing prospect before him. At forty he's no better than a phonograph repeating old songs.

"I've no craving to be this kind of hang-over from the past to the flappers of 1939. Used and patronized to my face: ridiculed for a whiffy old bore behind my back . . . the forlorn fate of perennial bachelors.

"Bad enough to be Don Juan in rompers, Jerry. I certainly don't aspire to be Don Juan in a wheel-chair. Taking it all in all, marriage can do no worse for a man."

"But if you must marry, Saxon, why should it be Mary Eunice?"

"Why not?" said he, watching with narrowed eyes, the trembling of her lips. "She's good-looking, attractive, intelligent. She fits in with the kind of life I want. Why not,

Jerry? A man may pass up a chance such as that and at twenty-eight never get another as good."

"Oh? You think the crop of lovable ladies is soon to wilt from the earth? And there'll be no roses in next year's garden of love? No more cabbages under the kitchen window?

"Needless alarm, ole dear. Girls are getting better-looking and more intelligent every day. And as our grandmothers might vulgarly rise to remark—though it mixes my metaphors —there's just as fine fish in the sea as ever were caught. And there always will be. Figure it out yourself.

"So there's no mad rush on that account. You're really very young, Sacks, even at twenty-eight plus, to give up the dream of ecstasy. Besides, you're much older now than you'll be a few years hence. Because now you're just fresh from disillusions: just fresh from experiments with life that have a grand little way of proving not mad moments but DRAB ones. And antiquity has no greater old-age than disillusion.

"So why cheat yourself with this kind of a marriage, Saxon? Why tie up with Mary Eunice?"

"What have you against her, Jerry?"

"In herself, nothing. As a wife for you—everything."

"How do you figure that? She's tolerant, charming, well-to-do. Willing to go her way and let me go mine. Pleased with me as I am and not seeking to make me over according to her particular i—"

"If that's what you seek," interrupted Jerry, color sweeping into her cheeks and a wild brilliance in her eyes, "you're choosing well! If you want a wife who'll give a loud cheerio when she sees you tobogganing sixty miles an hour to pot: if you want someone who'll keep you up till four g.m. over a rubber of bridge and feed you scotch high-balls and gin rickeys to keep up your jazz, you're marrying exactly the right girl."

"Why do you say a vicious, unwarranted thing like this, Jerry?"

"It's neither vicious nor unwarranted. She kept you up that night at Phil Cowper's till dawn. And your haggard look would make anyone's heart ache.

"Did she care that you were shot to pieces the next day? Her pleasure is more important than your work. And it always will be!"

She went up to him, cheeks stained and black hair flung back. She asked in hushed, violently subdued voice: "You want permanence and stability to your life? Do you think you'll get it with Mary Eunice? She's a spoiled, selfish parasite. She never gets up till eleven-thirty. And the only regularity you'll get from her will be the regularity of late hours and long drinks!

"What does she care for you or your work? What does she understand of it? Intelligence! You know yourself she hasn't one original spark. She cribs from you, from me, from books and passes Shakespeare off as her own to any one ignorant enough to know no better."

"Isn't that a little bitter, Jerry?"

She gave a short, nervous laugh. "For you—yes, frightfully bitter. Why, even her sexy stuff is calculated. Do you think a girl can sit in that favorite pose of hers, legs swung back, skin showing through chiffons, and not know to the dot just how much of her is visible?

"A clumsy fat mama in an abbreviated skirt and with seven kids to worry about may happen to sit like that and not be conscious of it, but not I or Mary Eunice!

"If you think a girl can slither up to a man, lean against him, swish perfumed hair into his very nose, and not be perfectly, wantonly conscious of what she's doing—if you think that, you ought to be put back into the cradle.

"Lord, can you sit through whole evenings with Mary Eunice and not want to roar when her hands subtly—I suppose you call it subtly—remind you that she has a lovely form and sweet curves?

"But how long before all this obvious stuff has you bored to madness? How long before you're screaming to be free of it?"

"Why blame Mary Eunice for the sins and shallowness of the generation?" said he absently, staring in Jerry's burning eyes. "She's far above the crowd."

"Pity the sins and shallowness of the generation all you want . . . do you need to marry them? You want permanence and beauty to your life? Well," said she, flinging about and shoving her sketches into a furious bundle, "leave Mary Pennings alone!"

He reached out and caught her wrists, flinging her about. "Why are you so excited, Jerry? Why are you gone so wild?"

And seeing her face that had been so flushed, so darkly brilliant, now utterly white—seeing her lips trembling. "What is the matter, Jerry? You're in love with me yet? You're mad about me yet!"

She pulled from him sharply: She said with harsh, muffled voice: "You go to the devil, Saxon Rhodes! You go plumb to the devil!"

CHAPTER XLIII

She pulled from him, bewildered and shamed by this onslaught of her emotions. She had meant to be so quite: to marshal the case against Mary Pennings with calm, deadly conviction. But the room glared with her hot, disorderly tirade.

Her hat lay on a bench. She would have to cross in front of him to get it.

And he was standing there, baffled, uncertain, tremendously shaken—staring at a little black curl that went up rakishly from her ear.

He picked up her hat, came over and laid it on the table where she stood with her back turned and her burning eyes glued on the stacks of samples—many colored squares of brocade.

"Thank you," she said frigidly. "I meant to keep you from marrying Mary Pennings. I've succeeded only in puffing your pride. You think I've said these things in viciousness and a mean jealousy."

"You've not flattered me with any jealousy in the last ten months, Jerry. You've given me nothing but flippancy and ridicule. I could almost believe you don't remember. Naturally I'm somewhat staggered. I'm wondering why you care enough to get excited about me now.

"Even if Mary were worthless, as you charge, isn't she good enough for me?"

She regarded his hand as he toyed with the pin on her hat —a beautiful, workmanlike hand. Her anger melted in a surging maternal tenderness—a kind of wild, protective longing.

"No, she isn't good enough for you. It would be tragic

enough to fling yourself away on her if you couldn't escape: if you were driven to it by a magnificent, unconquerable emotion.

"But why should you marry her when you can avoid it? Why should a man in this day and age enter so dubious a relation as marriage unless he can't help himself: unless all the odds are in his favor? Or unless he is reasonably certain that he will add to the peace and richness of his life."

"He would think that, of course."

She turned and for a moment regarded him steadfastly, eyes a soft, violet fire against the pale olive of her cheeks.

"How can YOU think that? Even granting her the intelligence, the charm, the tolerance you fancy hers, how can Mary Pennings add to your well-being? Any girl you marry has got to be second to your work: or, rather, she's got to be so unselfish, so warmly understanding, that she'll share your joy in the work. It's a terrible thing for a man with a burning ambition to find his wife a rival of his career.

"How long do you think Mary's tolerance would survive your neglect? Disappoint her because of your work and how charmingly will she bear it? Try the experiment if you've any doubt.

"I saw her in action. What do these plans that you're pouring your life into, mean to her? She was furious that you wouldn't chuck them and come down over that week-end.

"Mary's a great little sport when you're playing her game and playing it the way she wants you to. She's a charming, tolerant old dear as long as she's having it all her own way.

"But let the wheel turn against her!" She swung abruptly to her table and with flying fingers began checking the samples. In a low, rapid monotone she narrated the scene in the gambling joint. "It was shameful. Before every one. She swept her hand over the chips and shouted they were crooked. And she lied and thieved about it. She gave Heinie the laugh and told him to try and get her share of the loss."

"But she paid?" he interrupted, with shocked, hoarse in-

tensity. "Afterwards she paid? In the fever of the game, one might lose control."

The flying fingers poised. She thought that never in her life did she feel such a sickening twinge as this excuse of his sent along her nerves.

"She didn't pay afterwards." She picked up her materials and carried them to a chair in the corner.

And from here she went on more softly, more rapidly: "You think she's heart and soul behind you on those plans? She only wants you to win the prize so that she can go about boasting that she's made you. She gave you your opportunity. She even said she was backing you on this project: she was supplying you the funds."

"What! What's that?"

"She told it to Sylvia one day when she was spiffed."

She was not facing him and didn't see the sudden, agonized shock traveling from his mouth to his eyes: resting there in a still, incredulous stare.

"What, exactly, did she tell Sylvia?"

"That she was furnishing you the money: that it was taking thousands. That she urged you to go into it with her backing. And you finally consented because you were mad for her, and a woman can get a man to do anything when he is mad for her."

A peculiar, instantaneous change swept over him. Like a darkening. "She said this to Sylvia? And did Sylvia spread—"

"No, Sylvia didn't spread the word! She told me. No one else. Because she thought I should warn you, keep you from involving yourself."

"So you thought it was true? You thought I'd taken money from her?"

"There could be reasons why you might have borrowed it. I don't know what I thought or hoped. Except to let you know there might be strings to taking money from a woman."

The blood dropped from his face, leaving it grim and scowling.

"You came to my office to warn me, but you said nothing?"

"I saw that you didn't need it . . . you showed me that you had money of your own. I was terribly relieved. And there was no reason to exasperate you with her idle boast. No reason then for me to fling mud at Mary Pennings."

"You think there is reason now?"

She walked up to him and took her hat from his hand and stood, a long moment, looking into his eyes.

The youth and fire of her, even standing quiet like this, touched him. He found himself tracing the song and passion of her lips: the boyish wave of that black topknot: the lilt and freedom of her.

"Reason enough! You're in danger of marrying her. I see this and I also see now what she is. Arrogant and a cheat to her inmost soul. Think me vicious! I'm willing to be rated vicious if I can fling enough mud to save you from the fate she'd hand you."

"Jerry!" said he, held by the look of her eyes, by their high challenging fervor. They were so blue, so defiant and all at once so sweet. "Jerry, what do you care?"

She flung her head back with a laugh: "A cigarette, please! This has been a long, hard session. What do I care? Why, ole dear, I was once in love with you, and the great little mama in me is still on the job—still out to keep one Saxon Rhodes from hell."

She stood on her toes, lighting her cigarette from his. She grinned, blinking her eyes because of the smoke and because of a sudden half-fainting excitement finding his lips so near to hers. She said lightly: "And remember—sometimes mama knows what's best!"

"Jerry—wait!" The hand covering hers trembled.

"Can't! Here's luck to those wanting stability in their lives. I've plenty. And must hurry or the family dinner will be late, the bills unpaid and my children starved."

"Jerry—will you come in and look at my plans? Please—they're almost finished."

"Are they very fine? Are they worthy of you?"

He stooped down and picked up his hat, rubbed it slowly on his sleeve. "You be the one to say."

* * * * * * *

An hour later Saxon stood at his draughting board. An image went before him—young, fiery, sweet. It went quickly and vanished. For a moment the face hovered, mouth redolent of songs—high, defiant song: eyes passionate and brave.

He thought excitedly: "Warm as flame—clean as flame. Fearless, fiery, unassailable."

He repeated this last word and, leaning against the board, heard his own heart thump. He remembered the touch of her fingers as he lighted the cigarette. Brown and velvety. Remembered the way she used to tuck that little kid hand in his.

With a tightening at his throat he picked up his pencil. Worked swiftly. The door opened. Someone coming across the room. He felt a gruffness—a resentment.

"Not through yet? I've given you an hour."

"Thanks," said he, nodding absently. "I need another. Wait—there's a book."

"How long are you going to be?" said Mary, coming up to his board. "Can't you do this tomorrow? It's after seven and I'm starved."

"I'll hurry. I have to work tomorrow anyway."

"And you're not driving with us to the Beechman's?"

"You want me to finish the plans, don't you?"

"Of course. But you're awfully slow!"

"Shut up and have a seat. You don't know anything about it."

Mary gave an amiable shrug and pushed a bench where it was just within his angle of vision. She seated herself with a breezy: "I'm afraid you're quite a brute, Sacks. I don't know why I put up with you. I hope you shan't turn out to be a Bluebeard. Time will tell."

He worked. He chanced to glance in her direction. And was suddenly, blightingly conscious of her pose. The black chiffon, her legs swung back.

She began to hum. Then to walk about the room singing in a warm, husky tone. She stopped before him: "Give me a kiss to tide me over!"

For a few moments she stood there watching him: "That's the same sketch you were doing a week ago."

"No, it isn't."

"It looks the same. You fuss so over details. No one could tell the difference. Sacks, you'll be finished in a month. You've got to be finished then?"

"Yes."

"My birthday is in a month. I've asked for a new car—it's on the way now—the stunningest car in San Francisco."

She laughed: "I want to do something different for this birthday. I've never driven across the continent in a new car. With you. You can be ready by then. Let's."

He went on with his work.

Mary Eunice took off her hat and ran a white jeweled hand through her hair. She leaned carelessly against him, her head on his shoulder. A delicate fragrance drifted in his face.

His teeth snapped together. He would never be able to look at Mary again without observing her pose: without hearing Jerry's ridicule: "Even her sexy stuff is calculated! Swish perfumed hair wantonly in your very nose, and you fall for it!"

He was in a very evil temper. First because he didn't like being interrupted. He wanted her to cease her inane prattle; wanted her to remove her weight from his arm; wanted her to march to that bench over there, put her feet on the floor. "Sit like a lady!" as he recalled his mother demanding of his sisters.

But second because of an almost murderous resentment about that thing she had told Sylvia—that thing about supplying him with the money for the contest.

He wanted to hiss down at her: "Did you dare to tell anyone you GAVE money to me?"

Said Mary, rubbing her cheek against his chin: "Why the grand silence, beast? I've just finished proposing to you."

"The answer is NO again."

"But the ayes have it! It's been yes for three weeks steadily."

"Did I ever ask you to marry me, Mary?"

"I beat you to it."

"Did I accept?"

"I think your charming speech was this: 'Marriage with you, Mary, would be less intolerable than with any woman I know.'"

"But still intolerable."

"Never mind the gallantry, ole dear," said Mary, reaching her hand to his cheek. "But serve me food now and I'll serve the love later. I'm sorry I launched you into this prize affair. You've thought of nothing else."

That did it.

"Did you launch me into this contest, Mary?"

"I suppose I'll have to take about three-fourths of the responsibility. I never did such tall talking in my life."

He took a choking breath and plunged. "Mary, did you tell anyone you were financing me?"

"Certainly not. That's just between us."

"Oh—so you think you are!"

"Don't be quarrelsome. You know how I figure you, Saxon. I'd be glad to back you for a great deal more than $4000."

"Well, I don't think that you're backing me, Mary! You advanced the commission on the English manor house."

"Well, hell's bells, why the excitement! Figure it anyway you want, darling. Who cares? All the same two or three months from now."

An instinct warned him to desist. Too late to argue about it now. The facts were clear. The Pennings had engaged him to do this English manor house. He had submitted innumerable sketches. The plans would have been finished and the place builded. But they changed their wishes from week to week. Then the mother went to Europe for the summer. Everything was tied up. They were going ahead with it in the spring. Mary had advanced Saxon this fee.

He now contemplated the transaction with a violent misgiving.

He wondered hotly what he had gotten into and began to figure on reckless means of getting the money and returning it at once.

The presence of Mary here with her head on his shoulder brought the question of marriage repellantly to mind. Why in heaven's name will you marry if you can avoid it!

Mary reached out and flicked the pencil from his hand: "Now I've been good enough, Sacksie love. Eight-thirty. Let's wend!"

* * * * * * *

About the same moment Jerry was stepping along gaily in the warm October evening. She was in a blessed mood.

"Now I'm free of him," she thought happily. "All that a wench can do is 'did!' If he lives, he lives; if he dies, he dies!" And laughed, recalling his trembling hand and the urgence of his: "Won't you please come and see my plans, Jerry? I've been waiting and waiting for you to ask."

She would go indeed. And if she found Mary sitting up in her coffin, she'd gather more vicious nails and hammer her down hard!

CHAPTER XLIV

But the week passed. Jerry found no time for the promised call on Saxon. Two absorbing events happened. Mac Phail singled out an oil she had done and hung it in the place of honor at the Fall Exhibit of the Art School. Jerry was in a heaven of joy.

Within a day of this came a second tremendous moment. Among the death notices of a morning paper was this: "In the city of Los Angeles, Tuesday, November 9, 1926, Stephen, husband of the late Ellen, father of the late Stephen Jr., and grandfather of Stephanie Marsh, a native of New York City, aged sixty-nine years. Funeral services today, Thursday at 10 o'clock from St. Thomas chapel. San Francisco, Chicago and New York papers please copy."

The following day this message appeared in large type in the personal column:

"Reward offered for information of the present whereabouts of Stephanie Marsh or her mother, formerly resident in New York and California. Communicate immediately with Lloyd O'Connor, attorney-at-law, Van Orden building, Los Angeles."

"Could it do any harm to write now?" asked Stephanie wistfully. "They're all dead—"

They were affected by this.

After long argument, a letter was finally sent to Lloyd O'Connor.

Three days later, a large, black-haired man with handsome eyes and cool bearing, called at the apartment.

It chanced that Marza opened the door. One glance into that face so little changed by the years and Lloyd O'Connor knew that a fifteen-year search was ended. Marza was the living prototype of the girl who had smiled at him from that

medallion, drawn out on many a quiet night from its secret drawer and showed to him by old Stephen Marsh.

He knew all of Marza. He knew of Jerry and that sudden flight seventeen years ago from New York.

All Marza's information dovetailed perfectly with his.

"You saw those personals?" he inquired sadly. "Why did you never answer? You cannot guess how long and fervently Stephen Marsh prayed and hungered for some word from his son's child.

"After the boy was killed his mother found the medallions, your letters and a statement setting forth Stephen's paternity. They were locked in a secret drawer of his desk. But in none of these papers was the surname of the child's mother revealed."

Lloyd O'Connor smiled at Marza: "You see it's a personal trust with me. I promised my partner to leave no effort unmade to find you.

"Many times Stephen said, with the tears coursing down his cheeks: 'With my lad for her father and a girl with that face and that pen, for her mother, she's worth searching. I want her.' He hoped up to the last. The last word he spoke an hour before he passed was this: 'Find Stephen's child!'"

* * * * * * *

For days Stephanie was in a misty rapture, far more because of the heroic picture Lloyd O'Connor, with true Celtic romance, painted of her grandfather than for the tidy fortune she now inherited.

The money was invested and must remain so. She would receive $300 a month or better. There were, besides, some very fine pictures including an original Rubens, and the antique secretary that had belonged to Stephen Jr., and where all his treasured love-letters were filed away.

Dearest of all the bequests was the yellowed statement claiming her as his child and written in long-hand by the man who had so loved Marza.

"This is to certify that I, Stephen Marsh Jr., a citizen of the state of New York, am the father of a girl baby born

July 31, 1906 to Marza ——— in the city of New York. That Marza and I lived as husband and wife for one year and a half prior to the child's birth; that during this year and a half G——, legal mate of my child's mother, was continuously absent in Russia, and we, Marza ——— and I, shared a secret home and otherwise lived as a married couple.

"That it was our intention and most passionate wish to legalize our union. The return of the husband when our child was eight months old ended our hopes. Four years and four months have passed since our enforced separation.

"I herewith declare that I have formed no subsequent ties and that the little girl, Stephanie Marsh, above mentioned, is my first born and only child and the heir in so far as I can make her such of all that I now or may, at any later date, possess."

The statement went into details and ended with a poignant and affecting tribute to Marza, and a prayer for the return of "such joy as makes mere mortal peer of God."

Stephanie put the statement with other treasures in the carved ivory box that had belonged to Marza.

She said to Jerry across the radiant quiet in which the hearts of the two young girls thrilled to the beauty of that vanished romance: "I could die for love like that!"

* * * * * * *

A stormy evening in November. Stephanie and Jerry pushed their table to the fire and were making their dinner of canned tamales and coffee.

Said Stephanie dreamily and without prelude: "Men have forgotten such ways of love as Stephen knew. Fancy a man of twenty-eight writing to you or to me as he wrote to Marza. We ones of Today have lost many things!"

Jerry stole a look at her sister. So that was it! Heinie had ceased writing and Stephanie, too plucky to comment or to grieve was inwardly stricken. She was going about with other young men. She had been dancing at Taits. She had been to two weekend parties. The longed-for wildness was not, apparently, satisfying.

"What have we lost, Steve?"

"Beauty. Threw it away to gain license."

"We don't call it license. We call it honesty. We're facing the facts, little one, being ourselves and not an imitation of lillies and snow-drops."

Stephanie gave a disdainful shrug. "Yesterday was romantic: Tomorrow will be honest, but Today is just plain loose and unbalanced."

"A temporary excess, ole dear. Like all idol-smashers, we're jumping on the fallen gods and spitting in their faces. And calling them names. Silly, of course to rail against beings whose existence we deny. But all atheists do it. And being promiscious and boasting about it, is our little way of showing contempt for the repression forced on our grandmothers."

"Then all men expect to kiss and pet?"

"They all try to."

"Is there any graceful way, without being snooty, to evade?"

"Yes. Laugh! When a man, whose caresses you don't fancy insists on offering them, give an intimate, knowing, faintly mocking laugh. Not even Don Juan could make progress against ridicule. He doesn't know exactly why you laugh: but he does know that you're not falling—and you won't! No one ever went to ruin while mocking the procedure."

"Does petting mean that much?"

"As done by some, it means all the red, riotous things you blush to think of."

"I mean as done by a person supposed to be decent such as YOU."

Jerry roared. "All right! If I were you, Steve, I'd confine it to a few kisses. A kiss is a delightful thing when properly executed. And a girl—even the monogamous type to which unfortunately, you and I belong—should have a few as a basis for comparison when she is restricted to the ONE.

"By the way, when did you last hear from him? I notice that you've stopped writing. How come?"

Stephanie's face was turned to the fire. What Jerry could see of it was very pale—made more so by the dusky red of her hair.

"He didn't answer regularly. So I thought I wouldn't bother him."

"How long since you've written?"

"About two weeks."

Thought Jerry with panic: "He doesn't care for Stephanie. Heinie doesn't care."

Late the next afternoon when Jerry arrived in the living room Stephanie was reading a telegram. It was from Heinie.

She handed the telegram to Jerry and, standing on her toes, read it again over Jerry's shoulder.

"No letter for ten days. Are you ill? Please write immediately. Worried by your silence. Also very lonesome. Miss your letters greatly."

Jerry turned suddenly and glanced into the young, glowing eyes that told so openly their joy.

"No kick against the men of today now, have you, ole dear? You could go out and give them all one large, jovial kiss?"

Stephanie smiled absently. She was thinking how very dramatic and appealing if she were only ill and they could wire to Heinie: "Come at once or you will never see her alive again!" And if Heinie would then come flying down and implore her, for his sake, to live!

"What will you wire back?"

"Oh, I sent it already.

" 'So pleased you have missed my letters. I will resume writing immediately and copiously. I'm not ill, but very busy being wild and wicked. It was more fun being good with you. Love. Stephanie.' "

In the middle of the next morning a deliriously excited Stephanie called Jerry to the phone.

"Heinie's here. He didn't wait for an answer to the telegram. He thought I might be dying! He took the fastest train and came."

"Is he going to stay?"

A bright elfin laugh: "He says it all depends. Whatever that may mean."

That he was lonely enough to know what he was lonely for, thought Jerry happily.

And she began to count up the difference between Heinie's age and Stephanie's—about seven years. Not too much.

And she began imagining Stephanie in bridal lace and veil. How lovely that red-brown hair under the white and waxy blossoms!

Of course, she, Jerry, wouldn't dream of a wedding veil. But men like Heinie—romantic, old-fashioned, good to the bone, a man who could get real tears in his eyes listening to John McCormack sing "Mavis"—such a one as this was Heinie, and he should have his bride come to him in raiment like an angel.

And he would give to her—to this magnetic, sweet Stephanie a love tender and beautiful such as Marza and her father knew.

CHAPTER XLV

LATE that Saturday afternoon—her first free moment in ten days, Jerry went to Saxon's office. Plans for the great competition must be about completed now!

He was alone. The moment she opened the door, she felt a flash and tension.

He swung about, jaw set.

"Oh, you!" A young, half sheepish grin stole with relief over his tired face. He was haggard, almost gaunt, the tan hair slicked back so that his eyes looked feverish and his features sharp.

"You're drawn to a line," she said, eagerly, admiringly—"you're working savagely?"

"I've had to. Finish tomorrow! Paul ran in some extra plans on me. I've been up nights. You never know how much you can do till some one drives you to the limit. Most of us work at 20 per cent capacity. Goad is good for my type.

"Jerry, I've been looking for you every day. Why did you make me wait so long? I thought you'd be interested in the plans, anyway."

"I'm wild to see them. I've been away and whole lives of excitement have happened."

Color dropped visibly from his cheeks. Almost inaudibly: "What has happened? You've not eloped? Jerry, are you married?"

"I wonder if that would be exciting?" she asked softly. "Peril usually is. No; I've not gone and got myself married. And I won't."

He gave an abrupt chuckling laugh and laid before her a great stack of plans. There were finished color sketches of

the thirteen individual units, then a group plan for the Melhurst College building scheme.

He watched intently as her eyes traced the noble proportions, the rich yet chaste designs.

She held the group plan before her, reveling in the inspired unity of design; each building a distinct artistic composition, yet each an integral part of the whole.

And the colors. This so varied yet harmonious, excited her.

"I tried out fifty tones before I chose this one. See, I use two in the exterior, the lighter on the north surfaces. It casts a rose shadow, but in the strong sunlight looks like English gray—a warm color on overcast days and cool in summer. Much more satisfying than white and kinder to the eyes.

"Lovely," said she, forgetting his eager, almost pained suspense as she studied sketch after sketch—taking them up—comparing them, murmuring to herself softly, excitedly.

After an hour of this feverish scrutiny: "You're written your poem and it's magnificent."

He gulped and grinned and would have pushed the plans from her.

"No—wait!" she laid the small brown hands emphatically upon them. "I want to see something here."

"You'll be worn out," said he absently, but watching in a still fascination—a heat, a fire, a happy unrest in his thoughts. Like this she used to stand beside him those first days after his homecoming, rapt, intent, fascinating.

Like this, with a flush on her profile and the warm, singing lips parted.

Other women had stood at this draughting board and casually glanced at his sketches. He pushed their images from him.

He regarded Jerry; the set of her small, beautiful head. An almost defiant look as though she were challenging: "Come on, world! I don't back down!" A new look, a kind of fierce independence to her now. Yet a gaiety—a mellow sweetness.

He noticed her fingers and recalled with a throb their soft,

velvet touch. His thoughts incited him. And suddenly he was seeing Jerry as she had once come to him and with flame-sweet eyes waiting for the light of his, murmured blasphemously: "I bear witness—I bear witness—there is no God but you!"

Loved him like that—wild, reckless adoration. He reached over and covered her hand. He said huskily: "How you've changed! You used to care so much for me. You used to fling your head back and say mad . . ."

"Oh, yes," she interrupted, not raising her eyes. . . . "Yes" —softly.

" 'In youth it was a way I had
To do my best to please,
And change, with every passing lad
To suit his theories.
But now I know the things I know,
And do the things I do;
And if you do not like me so,
To hell, my love, with you!'

"I must send you that little book, Saxon, of Dorothy Parker's—'Enough Rope.' It will supply you with wistful words for sad situations."

"Jerry, do you ever regret that we didn't marry?"

"I did at first. But not now. The parting was touching enough as was. It would have been much harder if we'd been married."

"We wouldn't have parted then. I would have been faithful."

"As a duty—yes—I believe you would. But how you would have chafed!

"The only kind of fidelity that's worth a damn in my opinion, is the kind that isn't conscious of its loyalty. To be aware that you are faithful is to be unfaithful because it is to be mentally looking over the fence and longing to jump."

"I wouldn't have looked over the fence."

"Oh, Saxon! As long as you lived you would have looked over that fence and wondered with blistering unrest about the color and mad, vivid sweets denied you. You would have

felt robbed. The man's right to test by experience the heights and the depths!

"To me, nothing could be more humiliating than a husband chafing in his fidelity. I could more gaily live with a brazen cheater than with a resentful prisoner."

"You think all this playing around was inevitable?"

"It seems so, doesn't it?"

"But I've had no time for it in the last eight months. And no taste for it!"

"And tomorrow your exile ends?"

"I don't think so, Jerry. I don't want it to end."

She reached over for her purse.

"Don't go. I'm tired and feel like talking."

"It's nearly seven."

"It can't be—!" A flush—almost an anger mounted to his forehead. "Will you come in again, then? Come Monday—I'm going to send these plans Monday night. That's about the last moment.

"Jerry—I saw your picture. Sylvia told me about it." He gave a boyish shrug. "I put a deposit on it. It's a pip!"

She was a little surprised that he now seemed anxious for her to leave . . . he hurried her to the door . . . "Come in Monday—will you?"

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He went over to the draughting board where Jerry had stood. He visualized her with that flush on her cheek, the sketch held out before her. He fancied a pride, her voice thrilling with warm, tender pride when she said so quietly: "You've written your poem, Saxon. It's magnificent."

He flushed and took a deep, exultant breath. She was looking up to him—this new, fiercely independent, aloof Jerry. She was tremulous with pride.

Was this all that remained of her young, passionate adoration? How coolly she looked back at it. How shrewd was her appraisement of him and herself, even to that blunt, astonishing decision that a marriage between them would certainly have failed. So it was well they had not tried it.

Was her mind as definite as her tongue? And she held no loitering regret? No wish for a return of that wildly sweet emotion?

She was so very self-sufficient; so humorously impersonal about it. This piqued him. That faintly derisive banter of hers challenged him to reassert his power, conquer her anew.

But deeper than this—far deeper was the sense of loss he felt . . . an acute physical loss. He wanted her to be standing here at the draughting board regarding his work with that still intensity, her whole face shining with understanding. He wanted to hear her soft, excited murmurs.

He had always liked having her here—radiant, comradely, inspiring.

Suddenly he recalled her attitude when his hand covered hers and he reminded her that she had once so loved him. She bantered, but she had not raised her eyes nor kept the husky lilt from her voice.

Did she care for him yet? Could she care for him?

He was aware of a heat, a surging unrest. He wanted her to care for him; wanted this intensely. Different from all other women—fearless, fiery, unassailable. What an intoxication to be loved by this new, aloof, tantalizing Jerry; have her come with that passionate and beautiful defiance and offer flame-sweet eyes swimming with adoration to his.

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A hand was laid on his arm, a whiff of perfume in his face: "And I didn't tiptoe in, either! Dreaming of me, love? Were you really loving your work with those warm looks? Or waiting with wild impatience for me?"

"Interpret them to suit yourself. You will, anyway."

"Then you were yearning for me! How goes it? Are they finished at last?"

"They'll be finished tomorrow."

"Another tomorrow? You promised to end them today. And we'd celebrate tonight. I'm all keyed up for it."

Mary Eunice looked enchanting in an evening dress of

sapphire which her drooping sable soat revealed. But her full lips now took on a pensive quiet and she began to trace figures with her forefinger on the draughting board.

She expected him to comfort her; to apologize . . . at the very least to explain.

But he said: "I didn't promise anything of the kind. I couldn't."

"And if we go out to dinner and to dance, you'll be impatient and resentful the whole night."

"I will. I've no intention of going dancing tonight."

She gave him a sharp, challenging look. "You're getting terribly rude. It's a good thing this contest ends before your sweet ways are entirely lost. Didn't you say we'd celebrate when you were finished?"

"Yes."

"And didn't you expect to finish the damn things today?"

He laughed. "That was my hope."

"Oh, well—there's no use quarreling about it now, when I've put up with so much for the last six or eight months."

"Have you put up with a great deal, Mary?"

"Well—I should hope to shout I have. I'd like to see any other man treat me the way you have. You could at least say you're sorry I'm disappointed. I stayed home from a weekend just to be with you."

"I'm sorry about that—Mary."

"But you want to work tonight and tomorrow."

"I've got to."

She came up and put her hand on his arm, turning her face to his.

"All right, big boy, you go ahead and work. I'll go home and be lonely. You'll give me tomorrow night, then, and no strings to it?"

"Tomorrow night, Mary?"

She stood a moment gazing into his eyes—wooing him.

With her arms about his neck, she asked casually: "Who was the girl you were entertaining just before me?"

"I wasn't ENTERTAINING any girl!"

"All right. Who was the girl who was here with you just before I arrived?"

"I'll bite, Mary. Who was she?"

"I saw a girl going down the hall just as I came from the elevator."

"Perhaps you saw Miss Marjorie Green, the stenographer in the next office."

"Do stenographers work till seven o'clock on Saturday evening?"

"Miss Brown was typing till then."

Mary regarded him narrowly: "Saxon—you're not double-crossing me?"

"Why should I?"

"No reason since things are as they are between us!" She gave a soft, triumphant laugh, closing her lips warmly on his. "So much until tomorrow!"

CHAPTER XLVI

SUNDAY night an appealing and very gentle Mary sat opposite Saxon at dinner. She reached over and put her hand in his: "Been a long, hard grind, big boy. You'll win, won't you?"

"I doubt it."

Her eyes widened: "I thought you were sure of it?"

"Sure of my hopes. About five hundred other fellows for all I know may be just as sure."

"Oh, well—it won't matter. If you don't win this, you'll win something else, Saxon—you'll take a rest, won't you?"

"I'll ease up a little."

Mary turned radiant soft eyes on his—a young-girl eagerness on her lips. She leaned a little toward him and asked, taunting:

"Shall we take that rest together—you and I?"

"Meaning exactly what, Mary?"

She bit her lips in a sudden swift anger. After a hot pause she asked bitingly: "Just what are we waiting for? You're finished with this prize affair. The understanding was that we'd get married the moment you were through with that."

"Whose understanding, Mary?"

"Oh, ours, I think . . . yours and mine," said she, dropping her lids quickly over flushed, accusing eyes. "I get my new car tomorrow. We could jaunt off in that."

The music of the dance starting anew, Mary rose, reaching her hand to him. She was an intriguing dancer. She sang softly in a sweet contralto.

She whispered with her cheek to his: "Saxon, why do you wish to put it off?"

"Why put it on?—That's the question."

He felt her tremble—felt the hard tensing of her form against his. She said faintly: "You're jesting. It's rather trying when one isn't in the mood. But I suppose you're tired."

She tossed her head with a soft, indulgent laugh: "We'll take up serious matters later."

"Much later!"

Suddenly as they were driving home, Mary asked: "Saxon—are we not to be married? I'd like a direct answer, if you don't mind."

"Why speak of marriage at midnight, since nothing can be done about it till morning anyhow?"

"I ask because I abhor uncertainty."

"Why, my dear, uncertainty is the very pulse of love. That's why marriage is such a disaster. In removing the suspense, it kills the romance. Another case where the operation is a success, but the patient dies."

She was used to this light ridicule, and for her own reasons now chose to meet it.

When they reached the house and just as Saxon opened the door, Mary said: "Come in and have a look at the picture Jerry selected for my sitting room. I'm not sure that I like it, but she tells me to try it out as it's quite a gem."

* * * * * * *

She led the way up the long, old-fashioned stairway. At the landing she turned. In the subdued lamplight she appeared pale. Her emerald green dress—a color that she wore often, gave an unearthly glow to her satin skin and shadowed eyes. She reached her hands to his shoulders and with a soft, thrilled laugh moved into his arms. "You've not been up here. I had you in mind and the things you would like, all the time I was fixing up my rooms. You needn't speak in whispers, dear. We're quite alone."

Mary switched a light. The sitting room gave back a mellow radiance like a garden in moonlight. Soft apricot and green in the drapes; soft apricot in the walls.

They stood before the picture—an oil done by one of the

younger artists in the school. Sunlight flowing over the graceful figures of girls bathing in a pool.

"Do you like it?"

"Very much."

"All that's necessary." Mary smiled and with a faint gesture of her fingers across his palm, she moved to the window. She stood here with her back to him. She had a willowy form and her bobbed hair went in a large, wind-blown wave.

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He was conscious of her charm; conscious of a subtle incitement in this still, deserted house. Conscious of it, but detached like a spectator.

He remained before the picture. Delicate girls stepping into the sunlit pool. Their early-morning look. Jerry liked this picture. She would. Joy and freedom in it.

Without turning, Mary reached out her hand: "Saxon—come here. Did you ever see the bay so enchantingly busy?" She leaned her head against his shoulder and pointed down across the presidio trees to the dark gleaming waters. Battleships were in the harbor. A searchlight from these opened the night with glowing, transitory pictures—a tree on the Sausalito hills—a lumber schooner crawling seaward.

"I used to hate this view."

"Why?"

"It made me lonely. I was so unsettled and unhappy before you came Saxon. I didn't dream what it could mean to be really loved." She let her head lie back against his shoulder and she moved her cheek upward till her lips found and closed on his.

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He remembered the first time she had done this; his warm, thrilled astonishment. His quick, boyish response. But he was used to the caress. It left him cold—stirred a sudden impatience.

"Kiss me! That's better. We've had delightful times, Saxon?"

"Very."

"You'd miss me, wouldn't you?"

"Naturally."

"Yes, after this year that has meant so much to both of us. Saxon, have I meant very much to you?"

"Why the dying gladiator speech, Mary?"

"Answer me, first! Have I meant much to you?"

"As you say, it's been delightful."

"When you told me you loved me the way that you did, you meant it?"

In the shadows he couldn't see her face—but her tone and her dreaming manner chafed him. It was late and he didn't want the opportunity she was offering.

"I always mean what I say while I'm saying it, Mary. I like you and your pictures and this lovely view—but it's a bit late to dilate on all these various charms." He gave her a teasing kiss and moved to the table where his hat lay.

"You're not going, are you?"

"I thought," said he, grinning, "that would be in order since it's one o'clock in the morning."

"One o'clock in the morning isn't exactly a celebration, is it, after seven months—nearly that—of solitary confinement. Saxon—do you realize I've been looking forward to the finish of your plans all this time?"

"Mary, dear—"

"No—" she brushed his hand aside and stood resting on the arm of a chair, her head downcast.

"Mary—what did you want—what did you plan on for tonight?"

"For one thing," she answered quietly, "I wanted to get things definitely settled."

"Like what?"

"You and I!" She came up and with a smile took his hand. "Sit down a moment. Saxon—the folks are going away next week. They're going to the islands and to China. They'll be gone six months. They say I've got to go with them. Father just becomes more and more tyrannical."

"Not exactly a punishment, is it? Nice long sea voyage like that."

* * * * * * *

She leveled her eyes to his. They were no longer blue but a shadowed green. She looked at him intently.

"You understand that I'm not going with them!"

"Can you get out of it?"

"Of course! When I marry you. That's why I want to get it settled now."

"If that's your only escape, Mary, my dear, you'll find yourself in China."

"You almost sound as though you meant it."

"What language shall I use so that you'll know I mean it?"

Her pallor and her suppressed nervous excitement were lost on him.

She was sitting very close to him. She stumped out her cigarette on her slipper. And for a moment remained leaning down, her hands clasped on her knees.

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She sat up abruptly: "Give me a cigarette! Never mind, I'll reach." She slipped her hand to his vest pocket, felt about.

Slowly she withdrew her hand—smiled. After a weighty moment raised her lips for the cigarette he lighted. "Then you think I'll have to go to China with them, Saxon?"

"I fear it greatly, dear Mary."

Said she, with her pallor intensifying. "It's one thing to deny with words and another to accept with deeds. For the past eight months you've tacitly accepted our engagement."

"How, Mary?"

"So much so that every one is talking about it!"

"And I'm responsible for that? In what way did I accept an engagement? I've not concealed my intentions. They've been rather brutally apparent. In the past two years I've not once contemplated marriage nor given anyone reason to think that I would."

"You never intended to marry me?"

"Is it a surprise to you, Mary?"

"Then it's all off between us?"

"It was never on."

"No? You didn't intend to marry me last March?"

"Why last March?"

"Oh, for the small matter of $4000!"

* * * * * * *

He grew livid with the shock. He rose to his feet and stood there smothered with fury. But she went on, hostile with resentment: "You understood perfectly well why I undertook to back you. You accepted the money knowing this. When a man accepts $4000 from a girl knowing that he may never be able to pay it back and knowing the girl believes his protests of love . . ."

"Protests of love?"

"Did you never tell me that you loved me? That I was unique—charming—the one tolerant woman in the world."

"I didn't understand you were paying $4000 for my continued regard. The money"—he choked on the word—"the money will be repaid!"

His angry, murderous steps echoed through the empty house. The front door banged.

Mary Eunice blinked. She opened her hand and stared at the key lying on her palm.

CHAPTER XLVII

He was smothered with rage and shame. He drove like a madman, almost sobbing with his fury.

He took money from her with the tacit understanding they were engaged and would be married? Took money knowing he might never be able to repay it?

The charge made him scarlet.

Moments of weakness when he had remotely speculated on a marriage. The moments were brief. And in the last months he told himself confidently that he had NEVER, even in idleness, visualized Mary Pennings as his wife.

Why, these last weeks, even anticipating her interruptions, his jaw would set. Couldn't she see he needed his time—every precious moment of it? Couldn't she see that he wasn't giving a damn for her head on his shoulders; that he'd plumbed her mystery and there was nothing to it, after all?

No, Mary couldn't see this. The possessive air flatters a man when exercised by the woman whose lure is new; it sets to bristling every cantankerous impulse when used by the woman whose hold is waning.

But women are obtuse about this and to themselves perennially charming. They don't believe that a man is actually weary of them. There is always some external cause for faithlessness.

So Mary could stand at the window, letting her head rest on his shoulder. Incredible that he would resist her. So incredible that it made her abusive.

Sordid and humiliating to have an affair end like this.

He would get the $4000 and send it to Marry Pennings if it meant murder.

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Half an hour after Saxon left, Mary remained tensely quiet —staring at her palm and the key.

She had brought him to this intimate room of hers—this warm, inviting background, told him they were alone.

He had dared to walk over to that table, reach for his hat with a casual: "I like you and your picture and this lovely view, but it's a bit late to dilate on all your various charms."

She took the key and bit it. A bright red fury spotted either cheek.

She went to the wall and rang a bell. She sat down and waited—smoking and tapping her foot. Smiling and tapping her foot.

Ten minutes passed. A man appeared at the door, twisting his face sleepily.

"Get out my car, Bill. I want you to drive me down town now."

She flung on her enveloping sable coat and with a laugh dropped the key in her pocket.

* * * * * * *

Monday morning Saxon arrived at his office. He reached for his key and scowled. Damn curse of absent-mindedness! Go and get the janitor again.

The last day of work—a few hours to fondle over these sketches.

He went to the deep drawer of his table, pulled it open and for a moment, stared blindly. His plans were gone.

With a wave of heat; of over-powering nausea he felt fingers reaching to his vest pocket—fumbling about there.

Mary Eunice had taken his key.

He stood before that empty drawer, his heart whirling dizzily and a cold enervating sweat breaking over him.

She had taken his key. Had come down here and stolen his plans . . . his masterpiece.

He stood motionless—almost in a collapse with the alarming possibilities.

Had she destroyed them? Annihilated this achievement

into which he had poured the fervor, the dream, the very life of his life?

In a choking violence he swept into the little coupe and started for the Pennings' home in Jackson street.

Mary Eunice had taken his plans either in an insane revenge because of his refusal, or in an attempt to force his hand. In either case she was probably holding them.

And in either case he meant to recover them. By any device. At any cost he would trick Mary Eunice into surrendering the plans.

Bill, the colored gentleman who acted in the combined capacity of chauffeur-butler, opened the door.

"Oh," said he with an affable bow, "Miss Pennings not up for two or three hours yet."

"I'll wait." Then seizing a sudden inspiration, "I'm going to look over the house for some changes I'm to make. I'll take my measurements."

"That's all right, Mr. Rhodes, you go right ahead."

"Cold ride you had downtown last night, Bill."

The darky gave a knowing grin: "I don't remember anything about that, Mr. Rhodes."

"That's right, Bill. But get me the bundle—that big bundle Miss Pennings brought out."

"Why, I never saw that big bundle, Mr. Rhodes—that big, immense bundle. I don't have any information on the subject."

"I hope you didn't throw it in the furnace."

"No sir! No, indeed, sir!"

"Because I'm going down there now and measure the furnace room. We may change that old coal burner."

"I sure wish you would, Mr. Rhodes. Just like going into hell down those awful dark steps."

The basement was below the street level. The stairs led to the rear of it. They were steep and wanly lighted. At the foot of these was a long dismal passage between the fuel bins and store rooms. Beyond these and round a turn was the furnace.

The front basement was not excavated and ended in a cave three feet high where old lumber, children's toys, a baby buggy and a kitchen table were flung.

Standing before the furnace where a big fire now roared, Saxon made hasty notes.

If Mary intended to burn the plans—and that would be the readiest way to destroy them—she might have had them brought down here.

His heart sank. An almost impossible task to search thoroughly this dark, formidable hole.

He pulled aside the baby buggy, looked under the lumber pile, searched the floor near the furnace for some scrap of blue print.

He felt confident that Mary had not come down alone to this forbidding place in the middle of the night. And he knew the negro hadn't. That blaze was not feeding on his plans.

"She's got them locked up in her own bedroom. She wouldn't trust them to anyone else, nor to any distance."

He went back through the lower halls, casting about desperately. The plans were bulky and couldn't be concealed in an ordinary drawer. The mere opening of a closet would reveal them.

He went quietly through dining room, living room, music room. He opened chests—examined bookcases.

After an hour and a half he sat and waited.

He tried to visualize Mary's mood. At noon her maid announced that Mary was ready.

She received him in the purple bedroom. She was sitting on the chaise longue and very alluring in a negligee of violet chiffon embroidered in orchids. She poured herself coffee, took a sip, laughed.

"Good morning! Sugar and cream in yours?"

"Good afternoon. I've breakfasted."

She raised her cup and smiled tauntingly: "I've often dreamed of the pleasure of coffee a la negligee with you, ole dear. How come that I'm favored?"

"You haven't the faintest notion, Mary?"

"I may, and then, again, I may not."

"Nice, chilly ride you had last evening?"

"I found it to my liking."

"Were you as angry as all that, Mary, because I didn't fall in with your sudden plans?"

"Eight months is not exactly my idea of sudden."

"Look here, Mary, didn't you take a rather mean advantage? You've been thinking of this marriage-idea, I haven't. You spring it on me at midnight. Even if I were het up about it I'd resent having a date snapped on me without a moment's notice."

She listened with that taunting smile and took a long, lazy puff at her cigarette.

"But because I didn't happen to fall in with your mood, you rush downtown and carry off my plans. Isn't that a bit unfair and childish, Mary?"

"I wonder!"

"We've mocked marriage before without cutting each other's throats over it."

The curl of smoke vanished. She blew another to take its place.

She asked smiling and icy, "And have you come to repeat your mockeries?"

"No, I've come to get my plans."

"YOUR plans? I wonder how you figure that. I caused them to be started. My money paid for them. I think they're my plans. And since all bets are off . . ."

"Don't be snooty, Mary. You didn't advance that fee with any tacit understanding that I was to marry you! You wouldn't stoop to an arrangement of that kind. Why in heaven's name need you?"

"No—at that time I merely believed your fiery avowals. And because I believed that you were sincere and that we would be married, I gave you the $4000. You don't suppose I'm going around dropping my idle thousands in indigent artists' laps?

"What kind of prime booby do you think I am? Advance

$4000 just to see you win a prize and myself a lemon? It was clear to a baby why I did it. Your acceptance of money you might never repay could be explained only on the ground of our approaching marriage. On that condition only would a man, unless he is a thief as well as a seducer, allow a woman so compromising a share in his future."

He thought of the plans, secreted somewhere in these apartments, and with tremendous effort controlled himself.

"Why do you say it was money I might never repay, since I was to build the Manor house?"

Her lips curved in a movement of patronage. "A house that might never be built! We may also consider an estate on the Rhine. Shall I advance the fee for that?"

"Mary, are you holding the plans as security for the $4000?"

"I'm holding them! For reasons best known to myself."

"To punish me because I didn't feel in a tender mood last evening? Isn't this a little ruthless? You know I've only a day or two to get all my blue-prints finished. After all, you're interested in this project. You don't want to destroy the work of eight or nine months for a passing vengeance, do you?"

She was listening intently, her eyes lowered and the color creeping higher in her cheeks.

"What will you gain by ruining me? I have hopes for those plans. They're good. You made it possible for me to go in on this. You want me to win that prize."

"Why should I want that? Want someone to make a fool of me! Boost you up for someone else—for that girl I saw in your office Saturday."

"You didn't see any girl in my office. I've not made a fool of you, nor wished to."

"No—you only played me along for eight months. You only took all you could get and then come out flat-footed and say you never intended to marry me! I love that. I just feast on that!

"But you've ditched the wrong girl this time, old dear! You've ditched just one too many when you ditched me!"

"Oh, forget it, Mary! I've not ditched you nor played you along, and you know it. We were the best of friends when we started out last night. And when we came back here you seemed in a most enchanting mood."

Mary Eunice glanced at him across a burning silence. He went on coolly: "Why did you all at once blow up? Things I said weren't new. A hundred times you've laughed them off with a tolerant shrug."

She tapped the ashes carefully from her cigarette and with an arrogant slowness lifted her glance to his.

"And did you expect me to laugh them off last night? Did you expect me to go on discounting your words and believing your deeds?"

"What did my deeds give you cause to believe, Mary?"

"That you loved me. That I was one woman in the world with whom marriage would be tolerable. Naturally I've ignored smart things you've said because I had your acts as evidence that you were only talking for talk's sake. A man doesn't play girls in my position! He doesn't pay them ardent attention before the whole world unless he has honorable intentions."

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CHAPTER XLVIII

He grew appalled at her tenacity.

He must agree! He must admit that he had bound himself. He must now assure her that in spite of all his words he did in truth love her. He wished to marry her. He must say this or she would not be budged.

And saying it would not be enough. He must go out forthwith and marry her.

The knowledge that she was waiting for this; that this only would appease her, aroused him to growing, insensate fury.

She sat there so monumentally insolent, puffing her cigarette, removing it with leisurely disdain.

The voilet negligee had scarfs of chiffon fastened to her wrists. These fluttered with an indolent grace as she moved her hands.

The sight of her in this attitude of conscious power filled him with monstrous repulsion. Sitting there smiling and waiting for him to cringe.

"In any event," said he, walking up to the coffee table and with superhuman effort, covering his furious antagonism, "how do you simplify matters by stealing my plans? If I haven't intended to marry you, do you think this move of yours will force me into it?

"Hadn't you better return the plans and let the case between us be decided on its merits? If I were mad for you, could you force me into a declaration by a trick like this?"

She flung her head back with a jerking suddenness. Two blazing green eyes met his—narrowed dangerously.

"Ah—you want the plans first! MY plans?"

"Good God!" said he. "Did you think you could club me into marrying YOU by holding out on them?"

Her eyes became slits—lighted green slits. And they now slanted with Oriental subtlety. "You are mad for me! But you want the plans returned before you will say it!"

She drew herself from the couch and came close to him—so close he felt her breath—felt its warmth. She said with low, insulting command: "The interview is ended. I'm having guests for luncheon and shall now dress. You may leave!"

He caught her wrists, backed her to the wall. He leaned down and whispered hoarsely: "Give me the plans!"

She tossed her head back with a laugh: "I've only to scream and you'll be kicked out like a dog!"

"You won't scream! I warn you. But you go now and get my plans."

"Oh, you want your plans, do you? You don't think it's fair to be robbed after pouring eight months of love into a thing. But I think it's so nice and chummy to have two made monkeys. The laugh's on you, big boy!"

She stood defying him. She could defy him. She had his work, his life of the past eight months, his inspired and beautiful dream in her possession. She could destroy it. She would destroy it!

He shook her so that her head knocked against the wall. But he was not aware he was doing this. He was saying with a hoarse low sob, "Get them! You'll get them! Oh, my God, did you think I would marry you! Did you think you could threaten me into that? I seduced you! Good Lord! Do you think your filthy money has any claim on me? And you'd beat me into it one way or another. Now you get the plans. You'll get them! . . ." His hands rose from her shoulders to her throat.

At the sight of his bared teeth, she suddenly flung with all her strength against him . . . she suddenly screamed out at the top of her voice. But he seized her hands and dragged her to the door. He locked it—locked the door to the hall.

"Now scream . . . !"

"You leave! You get out of here! I'll have the doors smashed down!"

He laughed at her. He went to the closet and pulled open a chest—he pulled out the drawers of the bureau, emptied the contents on the floor. He tore into her dressing room and in a maniac rage went through the clothes.

"And when you get through with that," said she, regaining control, "there are nineteen more rooms for you to rifle. There are two basements in this house and an attic."

She ran to the door in answer to repeated knocking. She said in a measured, exasperated tone: "Well, well—what do you want?"

The colored butler gave some muttered response.

"You thought I screamed? Don't be an idiot, Bill! I laughed. Mind your own business."

"But the guests are here, Miss Pennings. The luncheon is served."

"Well, hold it a moment. I'm delayed. Apologize for me. Then send Thelma up and tell her to wait outside the door till I ring."

She turned back and with hot eyes regarded the havoc he was making.

"When you get through wrecking this house, I'll advise you to drag the bay. You'll have more success."

He came up to her: "You've not destroyed them. DON'T!"

She backed from him. She said, frightened but in a soft, swift tone: "There are seven mutual friends of ours downstairs. Hadn't you better smooth yourself down and get out of here? My maid is standing at the door now and listening. If you don't leave, I'm going to tell her to bring Bill up here—I'll have the door smashed down."

"You'll have one dead butler on your hands!"

"That won't give you back your plans!"

She put her lips to the keyhole: "Thelma, I've locked myself in. Go into mother's room and open that pass door with her key—"

"You've not destroyed those plans," he repeated, turning on her a livid and terrible glance: "Don't!"

CHAPTER XLIX

At 2 o'clock Saxon walked into his office. He went blindly past a visitor sitting on a bench. He reached the draughting broad, pulled open the deep drawer that was now empty, stood before it muttering. He was blanched and desperate.

Jerry, whom he had not even seen, and who was waiting for him, watched in blank astonishment.

"What's the matter?" she inquired, touching his arm.

"She stole my plans!"

When she stared, uncomprehending, he repeated with a scowl. "She came down here last night and carried them away. They're gone! Can't you see?"

"And all the blue prints—all the duplicates?"

"Cleaned out. There's what's left."

When the withering truth was clear to her: when he had told the bald, vicious facts, sparing neither Mary nor himself, she said palely: "She's not destroyed them!"

"She will!"

"But if the guests are already there, she can't carry down a huge bundle of plans like that . . . drag it all the way to that terrible basement. And she can't burn them in secrecy anywhere else. There are only the downstairs fireplaces in use. And those small old-fashioned grates wouldn't serve at all. She has to wait till the guests are gone—till she has time.

"Saxon—there's a chance."

He leaned against the board where for eight months he had slaved through clouded, uncertain weeks to sudden, luminous hours when his brain worked with such singing swiftness.

On the top of the board, stuck there with a thumb tack, was a pen and ink sketch of the library. That was the first unit he had completed. He remembered the day—even the

hour, when the idea of an entrance court had come to him. And he had achieved that lovely note of seclusion with the high, sheltering wall and the setting of palm trees. This composition, he knew, was a triumph.

Even Paul had been extravagant, had said: "Of its kind, a finer thing could not be done."

So he had labored harder, loving it and chastening it to the last detail. His masterpiece—wrought of his youth and his noblest dream.

Mary Pennings might even now be destroying this.

His fingers curled with the delicious feel of her throat melting to their pressure.

"Oh, Saxon, listen! Won't you listen?"

He perceived Jerry standing at his side.

"Do you think the plans are in the house? Can't you concentrate?"

"Yes—I can. That is what I think," he answered grimly. "The plans were brought to that house at about 3 o'clock this morning. Her chauffeur carried them up. I'm sure of this from his manner—from his unconscious description of the big, immense bundle. They were not burned when I arrived there this morning nor when I left at a quarter of two."

"She might have left them in her car—locked the car up and sent it to a garage. Saxon, she would be sure that you would go out there this morning to regain them. Wouldn't she be afraid to bring them to the house?"

"When it has twenty rooms? And there are closets within closets? In that room of hers she could have hidden them in the inner closet of her dressing room and there would be three doors to smash before you reached them. It would take days to thoroughly search that house. Only a miracle could direct a stranger to their hiding place.

"But she won't take any chances now. She'll finish them definitely now."

"Not for two hours at the earliest," said Jerry with intense quiet. "Listen, she's playing bridge now. She's got to—

there were only seven guests. They may stay at it till six. They'll drink gin rickeys. She'll get tight.

"Saxon, I'll go out there. On some pretense about the picture or new tie-backs for her drapes. I'll wait for her. If the plans are in the house, you have a chance. There are but two things she can do—burn them in the furnace or send them away in the machine.

"There's only one way to reach that furnace and only one exit to the street.

"Saxon, you watch the outside. Can anyone carry those plans away if you're there to prevent it?

"I'll watch the inside." She closed her eyes. She reached up her hands, and with a soft, trembling laugh, touched his face. "We have two hours!"

At 4 o'clock Jerry reached the Pennings' home. The maid admitted her. But instead of the usual: "Just go right up, if you wish, Miss King," she was ushered stiffly into the living room.

"You wish to wait, Miss King? But Miss Pennings will not be free for an hour. I doubt if she will have time to see you. She has been forced to cut the afternoon short."

"Oh, that's all right, Thelma, I only need a moment. And now that I've come all the way out from town, I'll wait. She expects me."

The maid, who was usually talkative and smiling, had a furtive, intimidated look.

"She saw the havoc in Mary's room," thought Jerry. "And it's not finished yet!"

The card room where the two tables of bridge were set, adjoined the living room.

In the great mirror over the fireplace this room was now imaged. Jerry saw the eight girls among them Mary Eunice. Mary was sitting very erect, pale and decisive—hands moving swiftly, eyes glued to the table. Nothing betrayed her but the pallor which drained even her lips—that and her unnatural, statue-like stillness. She raised her glass, took a long, avid drink, drew in her lips.

Her voice reached Jerry: "At the finish of this rubber, we quit."

"I'm for playing on. I'm $15 in the hole, and my husband's only a poor artist. Have a heart, Mary!" ordered Nellie Spear.

"Sorry—you can come back tomorrow."

"We'll stay on—you can go," insisted Nellie.

"Can't be done!"

Fifteen minutes later the guests were leaving. Mary went back to the table, drained her glass, picked up her winnings. Then Jerry walked out to her.

CHAPTER L

MARY, in an ominous and gloating quiet, poured whiskey into her highball.

As Jerry entered, she glanced up with a hostile: "What are you doing here?"

"Having paid a taxi $1.75 to arrive, Mary, I had to stick. I've got to know whether that picture is sold or not. How do you like it?"

"It's the rottenest thing I've ever looked at. I hate it!"

"Really? But the poor picture's not that bad. What's the matter—did you lose?"

Mary pointed to the stack of greenbacks: "I never lose! Here—have a drink. But make it snappy. Sorry—but you'll have to come tomorrow about the picture. I'm in a hurry—rotten hurry."

"Then here's to love!" said Jerry, raising her glass with a trembling admonition of failure. "Here's to the fatal and faithless—but they make us dance to their tune—MEN!"

Mary snapped her glass to the table: "What made you say that?"

"Sad experience. But not wishing the same to you, Mary."

Mary sat quiet, her eyes lowered. They seemed to emit a blaze—a sharp green blaze like the emeralds on her neck. Slowly the thick pallor of her cheeks was overlaid with an uneven red smudge. For moments she sat motionless.

With a sudden, ferocious gesture she knocked her glass to Jerry's: "Here's to the skunks!"

She set the empty glass down, clasped both hands about it and stared into it in a kind of glittering fury.

Thought Jerry: "If I can only get her to talk: bring up Saxon's name: incite her—goad her into it!"

"What do you mean—sad experience, Jerry?"

"Oh, you know all about it. Every one does."

"That he ditched you? Played you along ever since you were a kid? Then gave you the air?"

Said Jerry with a shrug and pouring her high-ball into Mary's glass: "The best woman wins—here's to you, Mary!"

Mary shoved the glass from her. She poured out an alarming jolt of straight whiskey and, ignoring Jerry's toast, asked: "You let him get away with it, didn't you? That's the trouble with the skunks—poor fish like you let them get away with it!"

"What would you do, Mary, if Saxon should ditch you?"

Mary leaned forward and with a slow, measured, slightly uncertain gesture swept the greenbacks to her bag. She raised her face in which the eyes were gleaming slits and the lips curving cruelly: "What would I do? I wonder what I would do if a man tried to wipe the streets with me! If a man made me pitiable—and a laughing-stock for every one to whisper about!"

Her hands suddenly shook. She clenched them and repeated with a low, revolting laugh: "Pitiable—a laughing-stock! She rose, put the flask of bourbon under her arm. She leaned down and whispered thickly in Jerry's ear: "Let him ditch me! He'll learn about women from me!"

"A boast, Mary—an idle boast. What would you do? Don't hedge. What could you do?"

"Blow around tomorrow at 11, Jerry, and I'll tell you what I'd do. No guess work about what I'd do."

She flung her head back. The red, mottled smudging of her cheeks made her eyes brilliant—made her face theatrical with that intense pallor about her mouth and nose. She stood a moment quiet—her eyes gleaming like the emeralds. She walked erectly, with only an occasional lurch to the front door.

She started to open this.

Jerry drew back with a sickening panic.

"Mary—I'll only keep you a moment. I've simply got to get that picture."

"To hell with that picture! Get it tomorrow."

"And I've got to measure for new tie-backs for the sitting-room drapes."

"Damn that sitting room. Whatta mess! I'm thinking of closing it up for good and all."

"But they'll charge you for the picture unless you give it to me now. I'll only keep you a moment. You see, they have another order for it, and the patron must see it tonight. I've an appointment about it."

Mary glanced at her wrist watch. "Get the damn thing out of here then! Never mind about the drapes. I'm in a hurry —rotten hurry. Hell of a hurry. I'll ring for Bill and have him get it for you."

"I can handle it!"

"Make it snappy—Jerr—pretty—damn shnappy—" She went up the steps, Jerry behind her. She turned once with a sweep of her arm that almost struck Jerry in the face. She said, gloating: "You wouldn't have the nerve! Poor fish like you let them get away with it!"

Jerry stood on a chair, slowly reaching for the picture. She thought in an agony: "What is she about? Where are they hidden? If I could only infuriate her into telling!"

She said, lifting the picture from the hook: "Of course, a girl can always shoot a man."

"And land herself a nice soft berth in the electric chair—or a cell for life."

"Or I could have gone to his office and torn up his work. He loves that better than life—anyway."

She turned about suddenly, saw Mary lift and drain another of those terrifying jolts of liquor—saw her draw in her lips. She answered with meticulous diction—conscious of each syllable: "Loves—that—better—than—life—doesn't he?"

"Oh, God!" thought Jerry, repelled by the tone and the look, "she means to do it—means to ruin them!"

Aloud—and stepping down carefully: "But there'd be the chance of getting arrested for burglary—there'd be all the ugly notoriety."

Mary was ringing a bell: a long, imperious ring. She was smiling. "Gwan—make it shnappy—Jerr—"

And to the maid who came running up the steps: "Tell Bill not to call for mother—to wait here for me. I'll be needing him."

"But your mother has phoned—she'll be waiting."

"Go down at once and tell Bill I want him. I wish him to report to me at once. Mother understands. And will wait!"

"Yes, Miss Pennings—right away."

Jerry tucked the picture under her arm—she steadied herself on a chair. Mary was going to do it now—was sending for Bill, the chauffeur. Whatever she did—she would do now.

She turned in a pale, fainting suspense. "So long, Mary—till tomorrow."

She flew down the steps—took a hasty backward glance—saw Mary returning to her room.

Thelma was gone to the garage to summon the chauffeur: the Filipino cook was in the kitchen.

Jerry went with a long, sneaking glide to the back hall. She thrust the picture in the closet.

And two moments later she was standing in the dark basement shoveling ashes into the smoldering fire of the furnace.

If Mary sent the plans down here, if she sent Bill down here to burn them, he would have to lay them down: have to go down that winding passage for fuel.

And in that moment—in that terrible, portentous moment—

She was almost withered with the flame of this suspense. There—the fire was out— She crept ten feet distance and hid behind the old baby buggy.

She slipped off her shoes and waited.

It was dark here. She heard a sound. Rain—it was raining outside.

It seemed to grow darker—frighteningly dark.

Suppose Mary would burn them in the upstairs grate? Suppose she should tear them to pieces in her own room—cut them up? But that would take so long—so mercilessly long.

Suppose she was driving away with Bill and would toss them in the ocean—weight them and toss them in the ocean?

They might be on the watch for Saxon—they might take him by surprise. Oh, God!—suppose they waited till midnight—stole out then in the dark. Or she might wrap them about her own body and escape in that way with them. Insane plans assaulted Jerry.

Then a door—the door to the basement surely. A step—the big lumbering step of the negro chauffeur.

She listened with her heart—her mind—her ears.

Suddenly she was craning forward—moist with terror. Behind those heavy steps were others—light, swift—Mary's footsteps.

The heavy steps—then the light ones following—heavy—light—in a deadly, tragic rhythm.

Jerry pressed her forehead against the old musty wicker.

"Now—hurry—stir up the fire—a raging fire, Bill—" Mary's voice, Mary standing before the furnace.

Thud—something dropping with a thick, lumpy sound.

"Make it blaze, Bill—quick!"

"Just a moment, Miss Pennings, I'll get some wood."

"Thish ish paper, Bill. Tosh it in and light a match to it. Lemme shee it burn! Lemme shee it BLAZE!"

Jerry sank clammy hands against her cheeks. Two of them on guard. She hadn't dreamed of this—Mary coming down to this dank, close basement. Hadn't planned, and couldn't cope with it.

"You wait just a moment, Miss Pennings. That there's too 'mense a bundle to burn without a fire. You just wait here half a moment. I'll get some wood."

Shuffling of heavy feet down the passage.

Jerry crouched behind the baby buggy in this sloping, unexcavated area. And ten feet from her, like a priestess of destruction, Mary leaned against the wall, her foot resting on the bundle of plans.

CHAPTER LI

"THASH enuf, Bill—raging fire—quick!"

Crackling of wood in the furnace. Red spurt of flame. In the flash, Mary stood illumined, her face a greenish pallor, with the eyes dilated and fixed. She swept an uncertain hand across her mouth: "Gosh—s'awful hot down here—suffocating—get a move on, Bill!"

"Go up stairs, Miss Pennings. You go long now. Think I can't burn this old bundle of papers safe nuf for you?"

"Tosh 'em in! Tosh 'em all in at once, I shay!"

"Wait till that log gets a start."

Dim figure of Mary swaying against a wooden post: crouched figure of the man fanning the blaze.

"Pitch 'em in—too damn hot!"

And on a sudden the fire lighted a frightening picture—Bill stooping—the flash of a knife. The cord tying the plans ripped apart.

Mary leaned down. With a swift, panther-like gleam of triumph seized a handful of papers, flung them into the blaze.

Jerry rose. In the sickening panic of that moment, she rose swiftly. In a wild, primitive vengeance.

The flames wrapped about the papers. Mary reeled against the wall: "There—thash the way! Tosh 'em! All at once. Bill, tosh 'em all—in—quick!"

The negro stooped, rolled the huge bundle, lifted it.

With the madness of despair—the raging madness of defeat, Jerry flung herself against the baby buggy.

With her hands gripped to the old wooden handles and the high hood concealing her, she sent it plunging before her full against the half-crouched, unsuspecting negro.

He went sprawling head foremost. He lay perfectly still,

the bundle of plans dropped in a wild disorder at his side.

Mary regarded the baby buggy with fixed, dilated eyes. Suddenly a scream—a shrill, terrified scream, shot through the narrow passage. "Jerr—! Whash—whash—" Mary went dwindling to the floor.

Jerry saw nothing but the papers before her: heeded nothing but the frightened, unconscious groans of the negro.

With one frenzied move she swept the plans together, rolled them in her coat, tying it about with the sleeves.

Quick! Drag them—lift them. Race up the steps, dash through the hall and out before anyone would know what had happened; before the negro, prostrate with terror recovered.

She was suddenly galvanized with alarm. The maid rushing down the steps, and the negro reaching out a hand, making a blundering effort to rise.

With a flying movement and dragging the plans behind her, Jerry reached the front basement. Crawled back there. But far back this time. Creeping on through the moist, slimy dark. In there behind the old lumber pile, lying flat, with her face pressed against the plans.

Just as the maid running down the passageway emitted startled gasps: "Bill—Miss Pennings!—" Then a shuddering, aghast: "Felipe! Come quick!"

A long pause. She could see nothing.

But suddenly, oppressively, she knew that Bill was sitting up.

"Lord Almighty—Lord Almighty," came the thick mutter of the negro. "I knowed I was doing wrong. I knowed it!"

The maid and the cook, gathered in a furore of terror, whispered excitedly as they lifted Mary.

"She's out cold—passed out cold."

"I told her to go up. She drank up all that there whiskey. Couldn't stand the heat. Don't none of you two say one word of this—one blessed word to her. She don't never need to know!" Carrying Mary up the steps.

The door closed. A cavern of silence in which the thumping of Jerry's pulse, the throb of her brain made ominous thunder.

Did they lock the door? Was there a chance to flee up now and escape? Quickly, like a ghost—like a lightning flash while they were busy with Mary?

She crept out from the lumber pile. Listened. And at a sound, crawled back to the sheltering, noisome dark.

That frightful door was opening. They were coming back! Heavy steps and lighter ones. Heavy whispers. The negro butler and the Filipino cook.

A searchlight flashing eerily along the walls.

"Right here—oh, Lordy, they're gone. The papers are gone!"

"They can't be gone, Bill. Say, you musta dropped them in the fire before the buggy rolled out on you."

"That there buggy didn't roll out on me! It jumped! It banged! It flew!"

"You're just scared. You been scared ever since you went to see that ghost play—been expecting to meet a bat anywhere."

"Why you think that buggy's gonna roll out tonight when it's been there for the last four years, ever since I put it there myself? Why you think it's gonna take this particular moment to roll out? Without a sound—then bang—crash. Oh Lawd Almighty, like a judgment!"

"We better put it back."

"No—we better leave it there. But I know one thing. I've gotta find them papers and burn them."

Furtive movements of knees and hands over the floor—flashing of the searchlight.

"Where you think you'll find them, Bill? You musta burned them."

"I sure know I didn't burn them."

"No one took them out of here because Thelma was listening at the basement door. She had her ear to that door from the moment you and Miss Mary came down here. Like she always listens."

"Oh Gawd—then I gotta go in there and look for them."

Bill coming stealthily—flashing of the searchlight over the old table, the chair—touching on the lumber pile.

CHAPTER LII

Ten feet from Jerry, the negro crept along the lumber pile. She heard the thick, groaning mumble of his: "Lawd Almighty, they's a ghost here or a man stole that there bundle. Don't you let him escape! They's a ghost screamed in Miss Mary's room this morning."

Nearer—feeling his way—the searchlight flashing on the walls and the old chairs perched crazily on the rotted stacks of lumber.

"Don't you run away, cooky! You heard that awful, blood-curdlin' scream this morning! Oh, Lordy! where can that bundle be?"

The negro, mumbling incessantly, came creeping—pausing, feeling with his hands.

The searchlight darted almost to the end of the pile now: almost playing on Jerry's feet, almost running along her flat, motionless form.

She pressed her face against the coat where the plans were hidden. She lay quiet with wildly thumping heart, and waited.

He was three feet from her. He was at the end of the lumber. Another flash—another move of those great, black hands over the unpaved area—

"Oh, Lordy, find that there big 'mense bundle for this yere darky!"

The searchlight wavering three inches from her frenzied eyes. She seized the mad, sudden inspiration and answered the negro's prayer with a prolonged moaning, "Noooo! Nooooo!"

The sound iterated with an agonized groan—a long, shuddering protest of denial. Then fled like a ghost through palsied, enveloping silence.

And for an appalled moment Jerry's mind was a blank. She

neither heard nor saw. She lay shivering with the madness of her own deed: not daring to repeat it: not daring to move.

Silence and an utter mysterious dark. Presently through the dimness went a chattering whimper: a muffled, piteous sob: "Lord have mercy! Lord have mercy!"

Within arm's reach, so close she could almost feel his terror: almost sense his eyes bulging from their sockets, the negro was sunk on his knees, arms wrapped about his head. For moments he remained in this attitude of abject, nerveless fear.

Cautiously he began to creep. He called softly: "Cooky—you heard that? Oh, cooky, you ain't run away?"

A scrambling plunge—a clatter of heavy feet down the passage, up the steps frantically. The door opened—closed with a stealthy abruptness.

Jerry hid her face in the bulky coat: choked a wild, relieved laugh—shaken from head to foot with this God-given, incredible escape.

They would not come back! They would surely not return to this noisome, ghost-inhabited vault. She was safe, and the plans were wrapped in her arms.

For an interlude she thought of this—only this.

And she listened. It was raining now—the rain dashing in sheets against the house—rattling on the stone pavement.

He was out there waiting.

She wondered what time it was—reached in the pocket of her coat for a match. The matches were gone—had dropped out as she dragged the coat from the furnace.

She sat up with a sudden thought of the searchlight. Three inches from her head it had flashed as she gave the long, moaning: "Nooooo!"

And it dropped.

She felt about for it. The sandy, unpaved floor had a slimy, unpleasant touch. She reached near the lumber pile, tangled her hand in a mass of cobwebs.

She crept along the stack, feeling her way as the butler had . . . suddenly, with a cry of delight, came upon it.

Shielding it with her hand, she snapped the light. It flashed

on her coat, on the musty walls festooned with cobwebs. And it flashed suddenly on the black, beady eyes of an immense wood rat, which sat on its haunches, front feet curled up. It sat imperturbable and motionless in the very spot where Jerry had lain.

She regarded it with a sickened apprehension, and, listening, heard a scurrying and busyness in the wood pile. The rotted lumber near which she had lain was infested with rats.

Get out of here quickly—go back cautiously and drag her coat with the precious plans.

She glanced at her wrist watch—ten minutes to seven. Dark outside. Safe to leave now. Safer than to abide here one unnecessary moment.

In the main basement, high up on the side wall and facing the driveway there were windows. She was thinking of these —make a ladder of boxes and climb out through these.

She considered this. And recalled with a shock that the windows were single fixed panes and didn't open. She would have to break the glass, then make a second trip back for the plans.

These were heavy. It would take careful moments as she climbed up, lifting these as she went.

And if a machine—the Pennings machine—should suddenly appear in the driveway? If it should come at the moment when she smashed the pane and before she had a chance to rush back for the plans?

She recalled also that these windows were directly under the dining room. And now or very soon the Pennings would be seated there at dinner. They would hear the shattering glass.

She leaned against the wall, now violently disturbed. The rain made a dismal sound and this dim passage trooped with melancholy, fearsome echoes.

It was blinding dark except for the fitful flashes of her searchlight. And she was afraid to use this. She would have to wait here hours—till the middle of the night. Dear God —take no chances now!

Were there windows on a level with the street from this

front, unexcavated basement—back there behind the rat-infested lumber pile? She would go and see. This would be a chance.

* * * * * * *

And outside prowling in the shadows, snapping his wrist to his eyes and regarding with growing alarm the passage of time, Saxon waited.

The moment the winter dark shadowed the house he came near to it. Mary's car was parked in the driveway. He went up quickly, pulled up the hood, removed the brushes from the distributor. The work of a moment! But that car would not speed away! That car would not carry off his plans!

A taxi drove up to the house. He drew back behind shrubbery. Mrs. Pennings with sharp steps and her head flung upward in a kind of challenge went up the drive.

The rain swept against him. A heavy storming rain.

Seven o'clock now—seven-thirty. What could have happened? Was she down there in that cold, noisome hole waiting for him—working for him?

He pictured Jerry kneeling in that dump heap. Suddenly his eyes were stinging. He had no right to allow this! And he became filled with a terror of what might befall her.

Eight o'clock. Lights in the dining room—a wavering thread of light across the driveway. He went up and tapped at the window—the low window giving on the basement. He struck his cigarette-lighter and held it to the pane.

Was she there—would she see? And know the signal?

Abruptly he heard a sound—a faint sound distinct from the rain but lost immediately in the rain.

He tried to follow it—he listened. And with a start was running to the front of the house.

No mistaking it! The shattering of a window pane. There—on a level with the grass.

He knelt in the wet. He called softly—

No answer.

CHAPTER LIII

But the glass in the window was shattered. He pulled a long, jagged point loose and, kneeling there on the drenched lawn, peered into the cavernous dark.

Someone had broken that glass but a moment ago. Someone hiding in that shallow front basement and wanting to escape?

He thrust his head in and called with soft, imploring demand: "Jerry—oh, Jerry!" And heard a sound—a faint, scraping sound as of a heavy, inert body dragged along the floor.

The sound came nearer. Almost at the window. It ceased.

With abandoned alarm he reached in and called hotly: "Jerry!"

A song flung into his face: struck deep into his heart. A high trembling laugh: "Saxon—quick—squeeze them through!"

The huge, coat-wrapped bundle came plunging into his wet, astonished hands. And the next moment Jerry crept out. Giddy with relief, she seized his arm: "Lord Gorgeous, hold 'em tight. And run!"

They plunged through rain and wind. They reached his car, turned a wild, triumphant backward glance to the Pennings' home. And for a moment sat speechless and shaken—staring into each other's lighted, blinking eyes.

Incredulous and almost collapsing with emotion: "Jerry—the plans?"

"Nearly all. I think so. I hope so! Drive somewhere quick and look. They're all out at Marza's. Drive there!"

* * * * * * *

They could scarcely wait to switch the light. They knelt on the floor, untying the sleeves of Jerry's ruined coat.

His hands shook and fumbled. "She burned some, Jerry?"

"Yes—flung them in. Oh, not many."

"If it should be the library—all of that . . ."

Jerry closed her eyes with a half-suffocated: "Hurry—please! If it's the library—all chance—is lost?"

"I've only a day—at the uttermost, a day—"

She was on her knees and now folding her arms, leaned over the plans as he went with hot, choking suspense, sorting them, checking them . . .

"I couldn't do that over—couldn't possibly."

"Hurry!" She hugged arms about her wet, mud-stained dress and shivered.

A soft, chuckling laugh. "She burned some? But what—what!"

The dirtiest face he had ever seen looked up grinning into his. Tears of frantic joy made tracks in the grime of her cheeks. "All there? Oh, Saxon, they can't ALL be there!"

"Except blue-prints and a color sketch or two."

"And you can make those up? You can do all that in one day? And send them all tomorrow?

"Then I'll go wash my face and lift the spiders, which are biting, from my shoes."

She began to laugh—a giddy, child-like laugh that she couldn't stop and that brought shiny tears to her eyes. She jumped to her feet: "My Lord, I'm starved! If you've got the strength, go out and scramble up some dinner—eggs or anything!"

She came running back as she washed her hands, trailing a flutter of suds across the floor. "It was luck, Saxon—sheer fool's luck and a baby-buggy! God bless the 'Bat' for putting the fear of hell into one Mary Pennings' darky butler!"

They sat at the table over a lofty omelette Saxon cooked. He was excited—almost unnerved. He clasped his hands to hide their shaking.

"You took a frightful chance—Jerry."

"It was the rat that nearly defeated me. Sitting up there with his cute pink toes curled up. And his brothers and sisters

scampering through the wood-pile. But I thought of Thoreau making friends of beast and worms. So I went gingerly crawling back.

"And I thought of you in the rain. And I thought of Glory!"

They sat there adoring each other—exulting in each other. Deep in their emotion and unconscious of it.

"Will you have to work the whole long night, Saxon?"

"Who cares?"

"Saxon, can you get the money and pay Mary Pennings back? Let her have no claim in this blessed dream of yours."

"In a week that $4000 will be returned."

"Can you get it?"

"Yes—from Paul. He's had a phenomenal year."

"You won't leave the plans from your sight again?"

"Heavens NO! But they're safe. She'll never dream what's happened. She'll be sure they're burned and I'm done."

"What a shock for her, ole dear, when you win the prize."

She went down the three flights of steps to the front door with him. After he had said goodby and was stepping to his machine, he turned and came back. He took her hands: "Jerry—what can I say? What can I?" And suddenly flung his arms about her and sobbed like a boy.

* * * * * * *

She lay awake trembling and thinking of this: laughing and thinking of this. Listening to the rain and loving it.

If she wished—

But no—she wouldn't take him in the pitch of this emotion, this almost heart-breaking gratitude. Nor did she want him on the rebound of his disillusion with Mary.

She would have to be sure now—utterly sure. Wait till this fever of working was passed: wait till his life returned to normal. And other girls and other luring faces beckoned.

Then, if his eyes saw only her—kept all their thrilling light for her—Her heart grew warm with dreams.

* * * * * * *

The following week she called at Mary's for the picture.

Mary eyed her suspiciously. "How did that picture get into the hall closet? Did you put it there, Jerry?"

"Bill put it there. Don't you remember? It was raining and I decided not to take it."

"I seem to have forgotten a number of things that happened that afternoon. I also seem to remember others which DIDN'T happen. So I'm told."

"You were magnificently tite, Mary dear."

Mary gave a wicked smile: "But not too tite, Jerr! As your friend Saxon may have told you."

Jerry returned a look of sharp inquiry: "Bad as all that Mary? Did you give him the gate?"

"And then some, I'll tell the pock-marked world! Ask him for me if he needs another $4000, will you?"

* * * * * * *

She meant to blacken him. . . .

"Let her try!" thought Jerry exultantly.

She was seeing Saxon often these days. Often in unwary moments found his eyes searching hers; all his manner apprehensive, tender—full of longing.

Paul was returned to the city and goading Saxon to the limit of his capacity. He grew thin and drawn, but she loved the passionate zeal of his look.

This was the Saxon of her happiest dream.

They had stolen sweet hours when he phoned and begged her to stay in town, snatch a brief dinner somewhere just that they might talk. These moments were very life to her.

Other times he came to the shop late in the afternoon when she was finishing her work. He tried to trick her into avowals.

As one day when she was finishing a sketch of an interior: "You've grown to love this work, Jerry? You'd hate to give it up even if it meant more time for your real stuff?"

"Oh, Saxon, we kid ourselves about not having time for our REAL STUFF. But we've always twenty-four hours in each day if we care to take them and save them. But mostly we let time pass us by. We'll seize the time to do the thing we really want to do!

"And why should anyone give up a job? Two hundred a month plus commissions is nice!"

"There might be reasons for giving up a job."

"Such as marriage, I suppose? But why, as I've asked before, does it add to a man's happiness to have his wife wash his dishes and cook his meals so long as the dirty deeds are did?

"And why does it disturb him to have a woman earn her own? Is it really necessary to crush the individual in a woman in order to develop her as a wife? And what have you when this subtle murder is accomplished?"

"But there might be times when it wouldn't be convenient—"

She interrupted with a mocking: "Because a woman is to have a child—"

"You mean seventeen, don't you?"

"More or less—CERTAINLY! Why need this interfere with other pursuits? We don't have to quit living in order to grow or to breathe, do we? And why, because a woman bears a child, must she be the one to fry the steak and scrub the floor, I ask. What is the relation between these occupations?

"A woman isn't a better mother for being a drudge: nor is she a happier wife for being a dependent. Love is sweet, but it leaves—while hubby's socks and the kitchen sink, like the poor, she has with her to the end of the cycle. Such being such, I keep my job."

"There are women who can marry and keep a job, too."

"So's your ole man, ole dear!"

She saw the eager flush die in his cheeks. And thought, burning: "Oh, it's love—it's really love that he is feeling now!"

* * * * * * *

In the spring Stephanie and Heinie were married. Gallant, winsome elf—swift and free again and looking so radiant in the veil and lilies of the valley.

"Angel Jerry—you gave him to me!" she whispered in Jerry's ear.

All the next day, Jerry felt happy arms around her neck.

All the next day she saw Marza's proud, love-filled eyes.

Late that afternoon Saxon dropped in.

"She looked beautiful," said he without introduction.

"Oh, singing with it," said Jerry, mistily. "Twenty and married and happy ever afterwards. That's the time to do it. A girl is so defenseless then. So under the power of a man and the mad sweet slavery first love is."

"Are you glad you escaped it?"

"In a way—since it doesn't last, but all first lovers believe it will."

"With Heinie it will last and with that gay little cousin of yours."

"Yes. But I wonder why we all insist so on the happy-ever-afterward money-back guarantee. Takes all the lark out of it! I don't want to be happy ever afterward. I don't want to be anything ever afterward.

"Every one needs a good he-brawl now and then. You don't truly love a person unless you're moved to goad him with an occasional punch in the nose.

"There ought to be a robuster, finer type of companionship than the love and eternal bliss variety.

"Marriage isn't life sufficient for a woman, any more than mere wife is woman sufficient for any man. He needs someone to talk to as well as someone to love.

"And a woman needs something to think of as well as something to worship."

"But what of your double blooming, Jerry? Oh, how will marriage interfere with you? Why, that little picture you did of the ferry lanes at night—it's a gem."

"I want to do ten of those?"

"Before you'll think of marriage?" He stood at her side, observing her hand with a passionate intensity. "Oh, Jerry—do you really think that it would hamper you? Might it not be arranged—the kind of a marriage you want? Not a thwarting of the individual but an enrichening."

She turned her face laughing to his, all her heart rushing

out with song and fire: "With you, Saxon? Do you want me now? For ever and forever—to love—to cherish and to punch in the nose? Your first love—and your last?"

He said solemnly and with a boyish pleading: "The only love. Could you care for a man who hadn't sense enough to know when a great gift was his?"

He looked lean and beautiful to her and with the air of a sun-god in his light, thrilling eyes.

"It may be, Saxon, that all the man's perceptions were heightened by experiences he may regret but that were inevitable."

"Will you chance it, Jerry. Will you let yourself love me again?"

She reached up and touched his face. She said with her head flung back and her eyes all violet flame. "Love you again, Saxon? I've never stopped loving you. I never can!"

"Oh," said he, stooping quickly and folding her close.

More thrilling than anything she had ever known were the tears she felt then against her cheek.

Two days later on a wistful April night, he called her to the phone: "Oh, come down—quick!"

He met her at the door of his office and without ado swept her into his arms.

"Why—what and hence?"

"Look—shall I—surely yes?"

A letter from Melhurst College. They wanted to know if he would consider splitting the prize. He and another architect named Ambrose had chosen somewhat similar schemes. They wanted to combine these and would throw first and second prize together, making an award of $25,000 to each.

"I'll wire 'yes'?"

She nodded and blinked. She said, dashing her hand against her eyes: "Oh, to be a fly on the wall of Mary Pennings' room when she learns of this!"

THE END

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